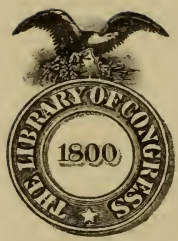

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THE WOMEN OF THE SALONS AND OTHER FRENCH PORTRAITS

Madame Vigée le Brun.

THE WOMEN OF THE SALONS AND OTHER FRENCH PORTRAITS

BY

S. G. TALLENTYRE

WITH PORTRAITS

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THE
WOMEN OF THE SALONS

MADAME DU DEFFAND

"THERE used to be in Paris," says Sydney Smith, "under the old *régime*, a few women of brilliant talents who violated all the common duties of life, and gave very pleasant little suppers." There is no wittier description of the Salonières.

The Salon, as an institution, is wholly and exclusively French. The practical mind of England always wants to be doing. The mind of France is more easily content to talk. In its Salons it talked to some purpose. They were the forcing-houses of the Revolution, the nursery of the Encyclopædia, the antechamber of the *Académie*. Here were discussed Freethought and the Rights of Men, intrigues, politics, science, literature. Here one made love, reputations, *bons-mots*, epigrams. Here met the brilliancy, corruption, artificiality of old France, and the boundless enthusiasms which were to form a new.

The Salonières have passed, like their Salons, for

ever. In the rush and hurry of modern life there is no time even for women to make conversation a cultivated accomplishment.

But one may well recall the lost mistresses of a lost art. For if they were too often, alas! corrupt, they were no more than any other human being, wholly corrupt. When one thinks of them, one must needs think too of a tact and kindliness most womanly and most rare, of hearts not a little generous, of ideals not always base, and of a wit, tenderness, and understanding that must have made social life a witch's charm for care.

Great among them was Madame du Deffand.

Born Marie du Vichy Chamrond, she came into the world just three years earlier than that greater than herself—Voltaire. She was of the nobility. Her father, the Comte de Vichy, had a dull, noble estate in Burgundy. The Comtesse was, it would appear, a weak, colourless lady. Few details have been preserved about either of them. There was an aunt humpback, clever, and—contrary to the custom of her day—both unmarried and unconvented. Perhaps she was the *vieille tante*, whose philosophy of life Marie quoted when she was herself an old woman: "Pour supporter la vie, il fallait prendre le temps comme il vient, et les gens comme ils sont."

The child was left early an orphan, and was sent, at six years old, a pretty, shrewd creature, to the Convent of La Madeleine de Trénel, at Paris, where

she was badly taught, or at any rate learned very little. That she was capable of learning anything is certainly not to be doubted, since the girl is always even more the mother of the woman than the boy is father of the man. But learning bored her perhaps. Weren't there much more amusing ways of knowing all one need know than stupefying oneself over primers and text-books, and paying attention to the weak-minded instructions of those simple nuns? The girl who was to become Madame du Deffand must have had even now that horror of dulness, regularity, and perseverance which was to be such a curse to her hereafter. "I was like Fontenelle," she said later, of these school days; "I was hardly ten years old when I began to understand nothing." It was the confession of a cleverness which, since it could not find out all, would sit down with folded hands and not bother itself to find out anything.

Marie was still a very young girl and a very pretty one at her convent when she alarmed the nuns and her relatives (and had a wicked pleasure in alarming them, no doubt) with a profession of infidel tendencies. The priest who was the girl's confessor argued with her, and Marie argued with him. She was the cleverer of the two, with that logic not to be taught by books, and the pious confessor was only zealous and shocked. Marie's good aunt, Madame de Luynes, became so disturbed presently by her niece's unbelief that she sent the great Massillon to catechise and convert this charm-

ing heretic. And the heretic, who was a little bit awed by the fame and position of the preacher, was moved not at all by the strength of his reasoning, while the preacher—who was quite human, it appears, for all those magnificent denunciations of his which are as a god's, and will live for ever—was, on his side, more impressed by the gay charm of this wilful dawning womanhood than by the naughtiness of the scepticism.

Marie found life very dull when she was grown up, and presently left the convent. What *can* one do in the country, after all? The voices of Nature did not appeal to this brilliant girl. She already liked the voices of the world, of homage to her talent and to her beauty, so much better. Was it to get away from the horrible ennui of staring at fields and woods and the *canaille* of the starving country villages of 1718 that she was so perfectly ready to fall in with the wishes of her relatives that she should be married? She was so poor, too. She *must* marry *somebody*. She did not know any one to marry but the Colonel Marquis du Deffand de la Lande, who was the first person, most likely, who had made an offer for her hand. One could not expect that the woman of whom her truest friend said that her judgment on matters of conduct was almost always wrong, should, under the circumstances, refuse an eligible husband simply because she did not happen to care for him. It was in her character to be always dying for a new experi-

ence, something to amuse her, to vary routine. She varied it at one-and-twenty by the Marquis du Deffand.

He does not seem to have been a bad sort of man, this Marquis. Perhaps he was from the first something of the nonentity he was to be for future generations—overshadowed always by his brilliant wife, rather stupid, rather indifferent, and dully philosophic. Or it may be, instead, that just at first, while his novelty had not worn off, Marie found him positively interesting, was pleasantly amused with her experiment, and troubled herself to be as entertaining and as delightful as she and a few of those gifted social contemporaries of hers alone knew how.

There are but the barest records remaining of her childhood and youth; and of those early days of her marriage, none. One must fill in the blanks from what is known of a later Madame du Deffand, and then one guesses what a frank, witty, outspoken, imperious, impossible wife the Marquis had made the mistake of choosing. How long was it before she began to find him a little bit monotonous? He did not do anything objectionable, it would seem. He was certainly not unkind. His only fault, perhaps, was that he had not taken into consideration the impetuous self-indulgence of his wife's character, her entire want of self-control, or the most elementary sense of duty. She found him a "tiresome companion," and left him. In all the history of ill-assorted

marriages one will hardly find so candid and simple a reason for a separation.

She went to Paris, threw herself into the quick life there, and satisfied her soul—or at least deadened the melancholy that even now must sometimes have possessed it—with pleasures. She visited everywhere; such a beautiful, witty Marquise carried her passport in her face and her intellect to almost any society. That queer separation about which everybody was talking only lent her an additional charm. It was so *bizarre!* The Marquise herself had the very good taste not to allude to it; and no doubt took care that it was only behind her back other people should discuss it either. She was still not more than two or three and twenty, very beautiful, daring, and imprudent, alone in a society where a woman needed a protector if ever a woman did; very much sought after, very much flattered, very gay, very delightful. She went to little suppers at court—that vile and gorgeous court of the Regent, where one would have given anything and done anything for the companionship of a witty woman, who would relieve the awful satiety which follows unbroken pleasure, and bring to those heated rooms and those jaded minds a fresh humour, a new spirit, a piquant story. There were other little Royal suppers, too, more private, to which Madame also went presently.

It is on the testimony of one man alone that she was for a brief fortnight the object, and the willing

object, of the Regent's degrading passion. But when one reflects that the man who tells the story was her sincere friend and confidant, and remembers the shamelessness of that society in which she shone, the statement seems but too likely to be true. It did not degrade the Marquise in the eyes of her friends. Most of the friends were not themselves in a position to be greatly shocked at such irregularities. All Paris was still at her feet when she retired for a while to the Château de la Rivière at Bourdet, and began to give those clever little suppers which were presently to make her name, and the whole interest of her life.

As the Marquise was not well off, it seemed thoughtful of her grandmother to die presently and leave her a little fortune. The first delicious novelty of those supper parties and of Bourdet had worn off. Madame was looking about for a new sensation. Suppose she tried a reconciliation with the Marquis! There could hardly have been a better moment, now that she had become comparatively rich. This woman's heart was always frank and generous, and alien to many of the pettier vices. Had she a feeling somewhere far down in it, too, that she had treated her husband—well, suppose one says rather cavalierly, and now she had an excuse for making amends, would make them? She rushed into her scheme in the most characteristically impulsive, hot-headed fashion. The pair had agreed on a six months' novitiate which the Marquis was spending at his father's house. And Madame

broke through it impatiently, received the gay compliments of all Paris on the reunion, and dragged the Marquis, as it were, home at once. What was the good of delaying one's happiness? Prudence? Forethought? The words were not in her vocabulary. The two lived in a "beautiful friendship" for quite six weeks. At the close of that time, Madame, at her end of the table, became ever so little *triste* and *distraite;* looked out of the window and sighed; responded to the Marquis's well-meant efforts at conversation with a fine melancholy; was more absent-minded still the next day; frankly ennuied a third; a little tearful a fourth; and so gently and despairingly wretched at last, that, as a gentleman, the only thing the Marquis could do was to return to his father. Isn't it like the scene in a little French comedy? They did not quarrel. Quarrelling is so *bourgeois.* They had even in this very difficult relationship the most exquisite tact, finish, *politesse*—and as for duty and self-control, no one could expect to find these in a mocking little *lever de rideau.* After the parting Madame dissolved into floods of the most bewitching tears. There is mention of an old lover whom she had had to displace to make way for the Marquis. It was all quite complete. The inimitable *Parisienne* who played the heroine—the dull husband—that suggestion of some one else in the background. All Paris laughed out loud. Nothing could have appealed more completely to the light-hearted cynicism of that inconsistent age. They did not disagree, you

understand. But they were so consummately bored! And Paris laughed afresh till it could laugh no more.

To console her new loneliness, Madame visited a great deal presently at Sceaux, where the Duchesse du Maine (who said she liked society because everybody listened to her, and she did not listen to anybody) had her "galères du bel esprit." Here was Voltaire, lean and brilliant, and Mademoiselle de Launay, not yet married to Monsieur de Staal. Here came, possibly, Madame d'Epinay, and certainly Madame de Lambert. La Mothe and the Abbé de Polignac talked together in one corner. Here the "divine Ludovise," the granddaughter of the great Condé, held her little court. And there, brilliantly ignorant and enchantingly naïve and frank, Madame du Deffand was making the acquaintance of that supreme egoist, the President Hénault. There was hardly a woman in the company who had a shred of reputation left her, nor one who was not perfectly witty and delightful. It cannot surprise anybody who knows the punctiliously careful immorality of this age, when vileness was hedged about with so much form and etiquette and decorum, as to be horribly confused in men's minds with virtue, that Madame du Deffand should have thought that the best way of clearing her honour—which really had suffered a little from her futile attempt to be reconciled to her husband—was to set up "ce qu'on appelait son ménage avec le Président." When she went later to stay at the Eaux des Forges she and the President exchanged long letters filled with

minute details about their health, and with sentences which show that Madame was not a bit blind to her new friend's defects. Perhaps he really was now, as he certainly was later, a friend only. Perhaps even in this topsy-turvy world of unpurified France—what wonder that its evil could only be washed out with blood?—the most charitable conclusion was still the least likely to be wrong. The Marquise, at any rate, was never a wholly vicious woman. She was at this time three-and-thirty. What she said of herself many years later was now, as then, the real key to her character, "Je m'ennuyais; de là toutes mes sottises."

She got tired of Sceaux, as it was her doom to get tired of everything. Why should she bother herself to illuminate somebody else's Salon? She was brilliant enough, alone, to light one of her own. She had already given a few very gay little supper-parties, after her return from Forges, at her lodging in the Rue de Beaune, and welcomed there Voltaire and his Madame du Châtelet, Hénault, and Newton. Their success had stimulated her ambition. Sceaux was more irksome than ever when she went back to it—as she still did perfunctorily sometimes — although d'Alembert, that fickle, womanish genius whom Madame protected and loved not a little disinterestedly presently, was now of its company.

The time, of course, was not long in coming before she broke with Sceaux entirely. She took apartments in the Rue St. Dominique, in the Convent St. Joseph—apartments which had nothing conventual about them,

one may be quite sure—and, in the room once occupied by Madame de Montespan, started those "Soupers de Lundi" which became the rage.

This was, or should have been, the happiest time in Madame's life. Her social success was brilliant. She was in the splendid prime of her womanhood. She was always either entertaining or being entertained. "I was at supper ce soir . . . chez Madame de la Nallière, demain . . . aux Beauveau, hier chez le Président." Everybody wanted her, must have wanted her. She was so amusing, so outspoken, so *méchante.* And still so *bizarre!* When her husband came to die, she went to take farewell of him as of a dear friend. No one but a Frenchwoman, and a Frenchwoman of this extraordinary period, could have survived such a situation. She held his hand, very likely, and apologised from quite a frank heart for having been—so whimsical. How much or how little remorse there may have been in her secret soul, God knows. She flung herself into the full tide of life again and forgot.

Was it only that she was affected by a more than usually passionate fit of ennui, that a day came when she suddenly abandoned her social gatherings, the suppers, the wits, with a shriek, as it were: hid her eyes from the lights and the glitter of the brilliant Paris she had loved, and took refuge in her brother's house in the country? Voltaire pursued her with madrigals, and her lesser friends with a thousand persuasions to return. But she was deaf to all alike. A horrible fear

had overwhelmed her. With what a torture of doubt and terror the suspicion grew daily nearer certainty! Her mind was a great deal too clear and straightforward to permit much self-deceit. It must have needed all the courage of the woman, to whom boredom was the supreme evil, to face the fact that she was going blind.

There was no wonder, with this doom before her, that her solitary heart had a sudden dreadful eagerness for affection, for some one to cling to, to depend upon. In her brother's house, as governess to his little boys, there was a certain Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, poor and clever, born in ignominy, young, proud, passionate, and charming. It was only natural that the two brilliant women should take a fancy to each other. Apart from the cruel fate, daily coming nearer, which the Marquise had to expect, she was now fifty-five years old, and must in any case have been in need of companionship. Were my brother the Comte and my sister-in-law the Comtesse a little bit too dull and correct for this woman, whose life had been neither? Mademoiselle interested her, anyhow, more than any other person in the house. A stain on her birth? Why, that was quite correctly romantic, and exactly like the beginning of a novel. (Madame was devoted to novels—they were so little trouble to the intellect to read.) In an ambiguous position in a rich man's house? Delightful! Impulsive and uncontrolled? So much the better. Mademoiselle had already arranged to leave the Marquis de Vichy's service, and was living at Lyons upon twelve pounds a

year when she received Madame du Deffand's offer of a home in the Convent St. Joseph, and an annuity of four hundred livres.

The Marquise went back, then, in 1753 to her Paris, and to her little suppers in the Rue St. Dominique, in spite of her affliction, which she had accepted with not a little fortitude and philosophy. "I am blind, Madame," she wrote to the Duchesse de Luynes. "I am praised for my courage, but what should I gain by despair?" In the spring of 1754 Mademoiselle de Lespinasse came to Paris, and for ten years helped her benefactress to entertain the most brilliant society of the age.

One can but hope that the Marquise found her new venture, for a while, satisfactory. The marvel is not that these two undisciplined natures disagreed at last, but that they did not disagree from the first. Madame's character was, one knows, quite frank, selfish, and ill-regulated; Mademoiselle's belongs to another history. They fell into that old, old mistake very likely, which makes it so commonly impossible for women to live together—they *wouldn't* leave each other enough independence of opinion and action. When the Marquise found at last that her companion had started a rival Salon—in Madame's own room, and at an earlier hour than Madame held her own—the final quarrel burst into fire. The bonds of affection must have been often weakened by minor disagreements before this incident snapped them for ever. There was a fine stormy scene. Mademoiselle threatened to take poison—did

take just enough to make herself and everybody else uncomfortable. They parted. Mademoiselle took with her half the allegiance of many of Madame's court, and all the faithless fidelity of d'Alembert.

It is not a little painful to think of the old woman —she was now nearly seventy—blind and baffled, left sitting alone, with how many dreadful idle hours to think over the desertion of this dear friend, and mistrust the faith of that! Hénault proposed marriage to the Lespinasse, it is said. All the philosophers were against this old Marquise—either because she would not accept their philosophy, or because the philosophers too were but men and preferred the grace of youth to the cleverest old age. But Madame was not to be crushed. Society was still breath to her body, light to her blind eyes, life to her soul. She plucked up a spirit. She had still some faithful friends, her nightly gathering of celebrities, and then the intimacy of one of the wittiest Englishmen who ever lived.

Look into her Salon at this time, on a Sunday evening perhaps, somewhere in the small hours. For all the late desertions, here was a company so uniquely brilliant, that as one watches it one understands what Talleyrand meant when he said that no one could conceive what a delightful thing life could be unless he had belonged to the French aristocracy before the Revolution. Here was Horace Walpole, smart and gouty, with his fluent bad French and his infinite sense of humour. Here was the President, very clever,

very deaf, and not yet openly false. Here were the Neckers, my Lord Bath, Gibbon, George Selwyn, Lord Carlisle, the delightful Duchesse de Choiseul, the Duchesse de Luxembourg ("very handsome, very abandoned, very mischievous"), possibly Charles Fox, and a dozen minor celebrities. What a feast of epigram was here! On whatever subject these people talked, they talked brilliantly. Lord Bath found that they knew more about the history of England "than we do ourselves." They evolved couplets, quatrains, *caractères*. Every other word was a *bon-mot*. These lions did not all roar together and drown each other as the British lions do. French wit was still the most graceful, the most subtle, the most delicate, the most tactful, the most considerate wit in the world. This company had the perfection of good manners, if it had no other kind of perfection. There is, perhaps, no wonder that with the strong dawn of a utilitarian age such an institution as the Salon should have faded for ever. Those hard people whose only business it is to act have long blotted out the class whose chief business it was to talk.

From her armchair, quite blind and very far-seeing, Madame led that matchless company and conversation with the easiest grace. She scarcely ever left the house in the daytime now. At night, unless she was entertaining at home, she was always at a party elsewhere, or at the opera, the theatre, or Versailles. She had the habit of never getting up until six o'clock in the

evening, like the wicked nobleman in a story-book. In the mornings an old soldier from the Invalides came to read aloud to her. She kept Wiart, her secretary, busily employed; wrote by him innumerable letters to Horace Walpole when he went back to England.

Madame's relations to this man were, it would seem, not a little pathetic. In the ordinary acceptation of the word she was not, perhaps, in love with him. She was many years his senior. But then, too, she was dreadfully alone in the world—with the saddest need of human affection and the saddest lack of it in her life. Her letters are filled with that impulsive warmheartedness in which there is no kind of dignity. "I want you," she says in effect. "I may make myself ridiculous by such an affection; but what do I care, what have I ever cared, for that?" And when he responded with that quiet prudence and carefulness for which one can but respect him, "You!" she says, "you! Why, you are a man of stone, of ice—in a word, an Englishman!" And, at last, "Pouvez vous ignorer? mais . . . je me tais."

She did not indeed—it was not in her character—subdue herself at all satisfactorily for more than a few days. The feelings of her undisciplined old heart came bubbling up through her accounts of the Du Barri or the Dauphiness Marie Antoinette, through her shrewd opinions of the books that had been read to her, and her notes on Salons and suppers. Horace was the one

passion of her life of which she did not live long enough to be cured.

As her years advanced, that fatal ennui which was her curse, gathered its forces to overwhelm her. Books bored her now. They were so long and so trite and so like each other! Throw them away. For this, too, is vanity. Her old friends were dead. She had outlived many even of her old acquaintances. The zest of an enemy or two was wanting soon. When they told her the Lespinasse was dead she only said, "If she had died sixteen years earlier I should not have lost d'Alembert." The President, too, had gone the way of all flesh. Oh, what a doom to sit alone amid the ruins of yesterday's feast with the other guests departed, and jaded memories of the banquet for all one's comfort! "I have no passion of any kind," wrote the Marquise to Walpole, "hardly any taste for anything; no talents; no curiosity . . . que faut-il donc que je fasse?" And when he replied in attempts at consolation, "I thank you for your good advice," said she. "I am old, deaf, blind. I wish I could take it; but that cannot be." It was the acme of hopelessness.

Even the society to which she clung palled upon her at length. As she sat in that old *tonneau* of hers, the wit fell on her ears, flat, stale, and unprofitable. How well she knew the tricks of expression and manner which gild dulness even, or make so little cleverness seem so much. To despise the world to the full, one must be a worldling. O God! what a death before

death, to see the vanity and emptiness of the life one has chosen, and yet to have no hope beyond it! This woman was quite without religion. She had tried to be *dévote*, and failed. She was sceptical even of scepticism. Call in the guests, then; multiply the suppers; laugh, talk, jest, that one may escape a little that "blank stare of the grave." Anything was better than those blind, sleepless nights of dreadful retrospect and shuddering anticipation. In the dead of them, the blind woman sat up and tried to occupy her brain mechanically by making verses. In the morning there would be at least life, stir, movement, the preparation for the company of the evening. But the nights—not all the precepts of the preachers are so awful a sermon as the latter end of this Marquise.

In the July and August of 1780 she complained of being more than usually feeble and languid. Her friends Madame de Choiseul and the Duchesse de Luxembourg came often to see her, and did perhaps the very little any human creature could do for her now. Her companion, Mademoiselle Samadon, was quite dutiful and uninteresting. Her servants had a passionate attachment for her, not founded on the virtues and stability of her character, nor yet hard to understand. On August 22, 1780, she wrote her last letter to Horace Walpole. "I have not enough strength now even to be afraid of death," she said; "and, except that I shall never see you again, I have nothing to regret."

From that day she never rose from her bed. She had no illness, hardly any bodily suffering. But she was tired to her soul. The ante-room was full of inquirers who had been the *habitués* of those brilliant suppers. But what could these people do for her now? A little while before her death she heard Wiart weeping by her bed. "You love me, then?" she said, with a pitiful astonishment that any human creature *could* care for what must have been troublesome and a burden too often. When he asked her if she suffered, she replied, "No, no." She sank at last into lethargy, and from lethargy very gently into death. That supreme weariness, called life, was finished.

How should one judge the character of such a woman? She was the princess of the fairy tale who was given at her birth all the gifts of the gods save one —the power of turning the others to account. All her friends—and she had many—spoke of her warm and generous heart, her instinct which was almost genius, her ready wit and tact, her clear, honest insight, her bold and independent judgment. In a very artificial age she was quite unaffected and downright, and retained to her last hours an extraordinary *naïveté* and freshness. If she could have disabused herself of the idea—an idea common in all the French upper classes before the Revolution—that life is intended to be an amusement, this Marquise might have been great too. But to escape ennui she married in haste, forfeited her honour, debased her soul, committed a thousand

daily meannesses, wasted her powers, and ended a fine example of her own aphorism that "Happiness is the philosopher's stone which ruins those who seek it."

As for her mind, it was one with which all but the very solemn will have at least some sympathy. Madame hated metaphysics, morals, and philosophy. She liked to jump at conclusions (and always jumped at the right ones) instead of arriving at them solidly by the stupid, beaten track of learning and experience. She loved anecdotes or a gossipy book of memoirs—only it must be gossipy. History? Well, one is obliged to read a little history, because it helps one to know men, which is "the only science that excites my curiosity." She was dreadfully bored by "Clarissa Harlowe," which is ever so much too long, said Madame, though she was almost the only critic of her day who found that out. Buffon she thought of an insupportable monotony, and "Télémaque" wearisome to death; hated "Don Quixote," and did not find anything in the vivid imagination of "Gulliver" to appeal to her particularly common-sense old mind. There was, at least, no humbug about Madame's opinions. She yawned dreadfully over Milton, as many other persons have yawned over him without the courage to say so. She had a very un-French insight into the weakness of her own nation, and estimated it—gay, bright, shallow, delightful—quite soundly. Nor had she the slightest hesitation in observing that that famous Jean-Jacques

everybody was raving about was disagreeable to her; that she had never seen anything more contrary to good sense than his "Émile," or to good manners than his "Héloise," and nothing in the world quite so dull and obscure as his "Contrat Social."

She had the very good sense, considering the position of all her class, not to be at all fanatical for liberty, which, after all, said she, and as if she could see into that wild future, is not to be found in democracy, where one has a thousand tyrants in place of one. "I always hated the people," she says again, "and now I detest them." Well for her, perhaps, that she did not live to see that day when the people sat in dreadful judgment upon such utterances as these. Her letters are as candid and impulsive as herself. When she had a great deal to say, she said it; and when she had nothing to say, she stopped. When she felt hopeless, she wrote hopelessly; and when she felt scandalously, she wrote scandal. But she also made that famous old *régime* live once more. She was herself an embodiment of its spirit, and a type impossible to any other age or nation. In her one sees its mad thirst for pleasure; its feelings after truth; its fine principles and its faulty practice; its wit, spirit, humour; its profligacy, selfishness, despair. And with her, something of the charm which made it delightful and of the candour which sweetened its corruption, went into darkness for ever.

MADEMOISELLE DE LESPINASSE

When some student of the heart gathers together the love stories of the world, he must not forget the letters of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse.

Mademoiselle lives, and will live, not as the most brilliant and sympathetic leader of the brilliant society of France before the Revolution, not as the mistress of d'Alembert, the confidante of Turgot, or the hostess of the philosophers, the Encyclopædists, and the Academicians, but as the woman who sounded all the depths and shoals of emotion and left behind her a correspondence which is still warm with life and wet with tears—an immortal picture of passion.

Mademoiselle's beginning was like her ending—like her youth and her womanhood—a storm. The mother who bore her in shame and secrecy wept over her and loved her with that ungoverned affection which can bring nothing but misery. She was baptized in a false name; entered, with an exact duplicity which deceived nobody, in the baptismal register dated Lyons 1732, as the legitimate daughter of the Sieur Claude Lespinasse, *bourgeois*, and Julie Navare. Her real mother, the Comtesse d'Albon, though she could not own her as her child, took the little creature not the less to her home in

Mademoiselle de Lespinasse.

the old manor-house of Avanches, where she was living apart from her husband. The little Julie had as companion the eight-year-old Camille, the Comtesse's son and heir. Is it safe to suppose that the children—equally innocent though not equally fortunate—played together happily for a while? or must one rather think that that passionate and restless nature which was to ruin an older Mademoiselle Lespinasse made even her childhood wayward, fretful, and unsatisfied?

She spoke many years after of her mother's affection for her, of the impulsive and sorrowful tenderness which tried to make up to the child for that fatal stain on her birth—for the future which such a beginning must bring. The little girl was surely still very young when she found out that there was some difference—a fatal difference, which a child feels all the more because it cannot understand—between her brother and herself. The Comtesse "heaped her with benefits." She educated her herself with an "excellent education." She did everything in her power to make wrong come right.

Mademoiselle was sixteen years old when her mother died and left her, worse than an orphan, to the tender mercies of the world.

It was from this time that the girl dated all her sorrows. But they began earlier. They began with herself. When she looked round her condition was deplorable enough. The considerable sum the Comtesse had left her she had given, with an impulsive generosity quite unwise and characteristic, to Camille. Perhaps

she reflected he had more right to it than she had—or never reflected at all. She found herself almost a beggar. She had indeed brilliant talents, but not the talents which earn a livelihood in any time, and certainly not in her time. She was very quick, bright, and impetuous. Not a person for a subordinate position this. She had grown up into a tall slip of a girl, not at all pretty, but with something even now in her face beside which beauty left one cold. She was so impressionable, so sensitive, a brilliant creature with her nerves so highly strung and her heart so warm, rebellious, and imprudent, that one does not need to be very clever to guess that when the Marquise de Vichy Chamrond (the Comtesse's legitimate daughter and Julie's senior by many years) offered her a home in her house, where she was to teach her little boys, and by no means forget that she had no legal right to call her sister, the situation would be wholly impossible. But Julie had no choice but to take it. Perhaps she did not know as yet that the Marquise, though more than kin, was less than kind. And she had herself such a charming sympathetic affection for children! "They have so many graces, so much tenderness, so much nature," she wrote long after. She took those small nephews to her heart at once, and, when she had long parted from their parents in anger and bitterness, remembered the little boys with a fond affection.

The Vichy Chamronds had a great house on the Loire. They naturally did not want this brilliant poor

relation. They showed her that they did not want her. But they were afraid of letting her go elsewhere. If she was generous they were not. They were suspicious of her ridiculous liberality to Camille. Did she want to thrust herself in among them and claim her mother's name? They accused her, very likely, of subterfuge and meanness, of which their hearts were capable, but not hers. How she bore that galling servitude for five years is a marvel. "I could tell you things from my own experience," said she, looking back at this period of her life, "that you will not find in the wildest romances of Prévost or of Richardson . . . and that would give you a horror of the human species." In every utterance of Mademoiselle's one must allow for exaggeration. Her emotions were always at fever heat, and her language as undisciplined as her nature. But it remains a fact that she had decided to leave her only home and enter a convent, when Madame du Deffand, the sister of the Marquis, came to the house for a long summer visit.

Mademoiselle fell in love immediately with this brilliant old woman, and Madame fell in love with her. They were both so clever, so impulsive, so romantic! The delightfulness of their sudden fine scheme of living together was only heightened by the Vichy Chamronds' opposition. Madame was threatened with blindness, and really needed a companion. No one ever appealed to Julie's sympathies in vain. She had never in her life been anything so dull as judicious or far-seeing, and had

the warmest heart in the world. She could not but feel, too, that, for her, any change must be for the better.

A few days before her final rupture with the Vichy Chamronds she received Madame du Deffand's written proposal that she should live with her in Paris. She went to Lyons, and existed somehow on the *cent écus* which was her whole fortune while the final arrangements were being made, the objections of Camille and the Vichy Chamronds being overcome, and Madame du Deffand trying to be cool and judicial, and discuss the matter soberly with her friends. One can fancy the delights, fears, hopes, which rose in Mademoiselle's heart. She was now twenty-two years old. The girl, who felt within herself a power and brilliancy not given to one woman in a thousand, was to be the companion of the mistress of one of the most famous Salons in Paris, and to associate daily with the most accomplished society in the world. What was there left to desire?

The history of that *ménage* in the Convent St. Joseph was from the first not a little strange. All the wit of the wittiest capital in Europe gathered round two women, one of whom was old and blind, and the other an obscure and nameless dependant, who had neither beauty nor fame. Madame rose very late, and received after nine o'clock at night. Mademoiselle had her little chamber *de derrière*. Here, in her many solitary hours, she cultivated her mind with Locke, Tacitus, Montesquieu, Montaigne, Racine, La Fontaine, Voltaire; read, and re-read, and read once more her dearest Rich-

ardson and the inimitable Prévost; and cultivated a boundless enthusiasm for Rousseau. When was it that the men, whom to know was a liberal education, first discovered that Mademoiselle was something better even than a divinely sympathetic listener? When was it that Mademoiselle first began to neglect her duty to her benefactress, and forgot that she was here to please Madame rather than Madame's friends? There was no woman in the world, perhaps, who would have been superior to the delight of subjugating, by a charm which had no need of beauty, such men as Turgot, Marmontel, Hénault, and d'Alembert. Or if there was such a woman, it was certainly not Mademoiselle. These men met her soon upon equal terms. Between five and six o'clock in the evening Mademoiselle held in that famous little chamber *de derrière*, her own Salon, composed of Madame's adherents, and while Madame slept.

She had lived with her employer ten years—and deceived her how many there is no means of finding out—when one day the Marquise, waking earlier than usual, came to Mademoiselle's room, and discovered all.

One can picture the scene very well. Here were Hénault, who had been the old woman's lover, and d'Alembert, who had been as her son—the pride, joy, tenderness, of her age. Here was the company who once hung on *her* words, who sought inspiration from *her* lips, and found in *her* sympathy sufficient. And in their midst, with light in her eyes, ardour and animation on her face, was Mademoiselle de Lespinasse.

This was, as it must needs have been, the end of all things.

The two women reproached each other bitterly. Mademoiselle was not a little hysterical. She took enough opium to ruin her nerves for the rest of her life, and to make her fancy herself dying. When Madame came to her bedside, "Il est trop tard," said the Lespinasse with her tragic instinct. It *was* too late for any reconciliation to be possible. The older and wiser woman recognised that from the first. Mademoiselle took rooms not very far from the Convent St. Joseph, and once more faced the world alone.

It was during those ten years that the influence which was to mould and then shatter her life had first come to her. Mademoiselle fell in love. It is said that a certain Irishman who visited at Madame du Deffand's was her earliest passion. It may have been so. But it is undoubtedly a fact that for the last seven years of her residence with the Marquise she was attached to d'Alembert. How could they help caring for each other? There was so much to draw them together. They were both, wrote d'Alembert, without parents, without relatives, and from their birth had experienced neglect, suffering, injustice. D'Alembert, too, was one of the most celebrated men of his age, already a member of the Academy of Sciences, of the *Académie Française*, and to be before long its perpetual secretary, and the recognised chief of the Encyclopædists. And he was also, it may be added, one of those inconsequent, sensi-

tive geniuses, as little able to look after himself as a child, and with the same appeal that a child has to a woman's heart. Mademoiselle must have been in her early twenties when they first met.

> "Que de défauts elle a, cette jeunesse !
> On l'aime avec ces défauts-là !"

quoted d'Alembert long after, looking back at this spring-time. She loved him with that *abandon* and that passionate sincerity which made her love irresistible. The rooms she had taken were too far from the house where he lodged for her impetuousness. She endured the separation for something less than a year. Then d'Alembert fell ill. Mademoiselle flung prudence to the winds for ever, went to him in the hotel in the Boulevard du Temple, nursed him back to health, and brought him home with her.

From this point one must not look into her history for any such dull steadfast things as self-restraint, honour, decency. The torrent of her passions seized her and swept her to ruin. She was not designedly bad. She was not designedly anything. Her impulses and desires were her rudder, and her shipwreck none the less disastrous for that.

Writing of the early days of this *ménage*, Mademoiselle said that her happiness frightened her.

There seem indeed—suppose one leaves out duty and conscience, and this pair left them out quite comfortably—to have been but few drawbacks. Only David

Hume, the historian, passing through Paris and coming to see them, spoke bluntly of Mademoiselle by a name which she deserved too well. The rest of her acquaintance, with that careful self-deceit which was so damning a characteristic of the age, conveniently accepted the intimacy as perfectly innocent, and visited Mademoiselle exactly as before.

It was a little while before d'Alembert joined her, and in the year 1764, that she opened her Salon in her little rooms in the Rue de Belle Chasse. She was now thirty-two years old. She was certainly not more beautiful than she had been as a girl. If the emotions age, she must have looked greatly older than she was. She had known so many! But her face, which never was young, had a thousand varying expressions to describe her soul; and her heart, which was never old, such warm enthusiasms, such generous indignations, and such an abundance of life and feeling, as, said one of her lovers, would have made marble sensitive and matter think.

Her gatherings could hardly have needed the additional attraction of a d'Alembert even. Those who came presently to see him stayed to listen to her. The chief of all the Encyclopædists, and the most brilliant talker of his age, might be well content to be second to the woman who but a little while ago was nobody and nothing, and who now, by the power of her mind and the charm of her nature, had all witty Paris at her feet.

It is extraordinary to think that this woman, or any

woman, could command such an assemblage almost every night for nearly twelve years. She did not even give the little suppers which helped Madame du Deffand's Mondays, or the little dinners of Madame Geoffrin. Should she by any chance go into the country or to the theatre, all Paris knew beforehand. Before five she received her intimates, listened, as only Mademoiselle could listen, to Turgot's plans of reform, or to the hopes of Chastellux for his coming election. After five all the world was admitted.

The meanest *habitués* of this Salon were the flower of intellectual France of the eighteenth century. Here came courtiers, philosophers, soldiers, churchmen. Here were Bernardin de St. Pierre and La Harpe. Here one listened to those splendid theories on humanity and the Rights of Men which, put into practice, ended in the Terror. Here were evolved some of the principles of that Revolution which was to destroy first of all the class who evolved them. Here one read aloud the last play and the latest poem. One might be grave or gay as one chose. There was all the good in the world, thought Mademoiselle, in a little mirth and lightness. She held in her slight hands the threads of a dozen widely differing conversations, and had the supreme gift of being to every one exactly what he wished her to be.

Can't one fancy her, very tall and slight, moving through the crowded rooms with her little dog at her side, stopping to speak now to this man and

now to that, with her heart always in what she said, a little impetuous in speech, keenly sensitive to the lightest change in the social atmosphere, very natural, very animated, very quick? When people talked to her they never felt how clever she was, but how clever they were. It was Guibert who said of her that she seemed to know the secret of all characters and the measure of every one's mind.

Is it some fine scheme for the good of the people this group are discussing? It must be, by the upturned face, eager and tender, with which Mademoiselle listens to them. She moves in a few minutes to another little coterie which is philosophic or metaphysical perhaps; and Mademoiselle has a passion for abstruse thought. Over here they are talking music, or art. The woman of whom it is said that she can appreciate perfectly, each in its degree, a Rubens or the little dead bird of Houdon, the famous painter on enamel, brings into this conversation, as she brings into all conversations, the warmth of human emotions and the vivid charm of her inimitable personality. Her contemporaries unite in speaking of her, as hostess and friend, with such a glow of enthusiasm that after more than a hundred years one still feels for her something of the passion they did.

It was in 1767, and only three years after she had given herself to d'Alembert, that Mademoiselle fell violently in love—with the Marquis de Mora. The Marquis was Spanish, ardent, chivalrous, and five-

and-twenty. Mademoiselle was ten years older. But what did that matter? Passion has no age, and, it may be added, no sense of humour. With the southern blood of de Mora on the one side, and the vehemence of Mademoiselle on the other, it would have been in vain to expect self-restraint from either of them. The peaceful d'Alembert was quickly swept aside by the rush of their feelings. His only use soon was to listen to the story—though not all the story—of Mademoiselle's devotion to his rival. When de Mora came back from Ferney, where he had been visiting Voltaire, she flung herself into his arms with a delirious self-abandonment. The fever of this attachment lasted for five years, during which Mademoiselle never knew a rational moment. Then de Mora, with the seeds of a fatal complaint already within him, had to go back to Spain.

They parted in an agony of despair. It was d'Alembert who fetched his rival's letters, and brought them to Mademoiselle directly she was awake. And it was to d'Alembert that she left as a legacy her papers containing the history of the episode and the certain proofs of her faithlessness to him.

What a pitiful story it is! One is hardly surprised to hear that Mademoiselle did not wait for de Mora's death to betray him in his turn. Before that news reached her Guibert was her lover, and the first wild hours of a new passion had robbed her of the last tattered shreds of her self-respect. Guibert was

soldier, author, philosopher—the man of whom Voltaire said "qu'il veut aller à la gloire par tous les chemins."

It was in her own Salon Mademoiselle had first met him. He was known to every one by his *Essai sur la Tactique* and his military feats in Corsica; and half the women in Paris listened, worshipping, while he read aloud his new tragedy, *Le Connétable de Bourbon*. With his connection with Mademoiselle began the correspondence by which she lives.

The letters were from the first a cry. The mental attitude of the woman who wrote them to Guibert, from the house of d'Alembert, and in terms of an ecstatic devotion for de Mora, may well baffle the student of human nature. Yet there is not a page of Mademoiselle's wild outbursts which does not bear upon it the undeniable stamp of a vehement sincerity. Her attachment to d'Alembert had no doubt cooled before this into friendship. But her very first letter unites a headlong devotion to Guibert with a passionate love for de Mora and a wild remorse for the fatality (Mademoiselle called it a fatality) which made her false to him. It is not too much to say that of these letters there is not one quiet, sane, or prudent. Though they are written in that purest French in which Mademoiselle thought and talked, they are in no sense a literary composition. They are only the bared heart of that unhappy woman who said of herself, "Mon Dieu! que la passion m'est naturelle, et que la raison m'est étrangère!"

Guibert was travelling in Germany when she began writing to him, not because he was obliged to travel, but because he preferred it apparently to being in Paris with her. She wrote to him constantly. She was never quite sure of him, as it were. Did she remember too often for her peace that she was forty years old, and had neither beauty nor innocence to give him? Her letters were full of devotion, indeed; but then they were full too of self-reproach—and of M. de Mora. This woman had no subtlety. If it needed art to keep her lover, she would not keep him. The thought of him was with her always. While her passions lasted, they were meat, drink, air, light, life to her. Even in her Salon, "From the moment one loves," she says, "success becomes a weariness. A-t-on besoin de plaire quand on est aimée?" The emotions of the last years had already begun to undermine her health. She was thinner and paler and older-looking now than ever. With d'Alembert she was not a little difficult and capricious—full of those impatient imperfections which first made him love her and kept him weakly faithful to the end. She had known Guibert but a very little while when the inevitable punishment of such a connection fell, as always, upon the woman. The excess of her devotion bored him. He must have a little recreation after all. There was a certain Monsieur de Courcelles—with a daughter. One knows the end of that story.

Mademoiselle received it, not the less, with a shriek.

One can see her face, wild, haggard, and despairing, through the reproaches she writes to him. "You have made me know all the torments of the damned," she says, "repentance, hatred, jealousy, remorse, self-contempt." And Guibert answers to tell her of that other person, "pretty, gentle, sensitive, who loves me, and whom I am created to love." There is no cruelty so complete and so selfish as the cruelty of a great happiness.

On September 23, 1775, Mademoiselle wrote to Guibert: "Perhaps one never consoles oneself for great humiliations. I wish that your marriage shall make you as happy as it has made me wretched;" and then, "You are married; you have loved, love, will love one whose brightness and strength of feeling have long endeared her to you—that is in order, nature, duty—and who would trouble your joy with questionings must be fool indeed. Quand une fois le fil de la vérité a été rompu, il ne faut pas le rajouter; cela va toujours mal."

Her health was by now utterly broken and wretched. It was her part to stand by and watch the happiness which had ruined hers. She was long past pride, past dignity, past honour. She went on writing constantly to the man who had abandoned her, conscious that she wearied and burdened him—bitter in her reproaches and her self-reproach—and contemptuous of the wasted love she was not noble enough to hide. Her body was racked by cough and fever. But the soul which fretted

it to decay had the brilliancy of the last flame. She still received her friends, had still that tender interest, that perfect understanding, that divine sympathy which were hers alone. She was in bed all day sometimes, with her misery soothed by opium, and got up at night to listen to this man's hopes of a noble future, to splendid enthusiasms which were to redeem the world. One last flicker of self-respect came to her before she died. She would no longer ask Guibert to come and see her. Sickness and sorrow are so dull! "Point de sacrifice, mon ami; les malades repoussent les efforts; ils leur font si peu!"

She would not have been Mademoiselle if that resolution had lasted and her pride had triumphed over her passion to the end.

She asked d'Alembert's pardon before she died. But the last words she wrote were to Guibert: "Adieu, mon ami. Si jamais je revenois à la vie, j'aimerois encore à l'employer à vous aimer; mais il n y a plus de temps."

Before such a tragedy as this life one may well pause. What was this woman? A sinner. But if there ever was a sinner in the world unmeet for compassion, it was not Mademoiselle de Lespinasse.

She said of herself with a bitter truth that everything was against her. Her birth of shame gave to her, as to too many other creatures so born, a fatal heritage of vehement passions, without the strength to control them. Her upbringing did not help her. Injustice maddened her. Her splendid mental gifts

brought her under the potent charm of those specious philosophies which were enthusiastic for a virtue more than half confused with vice, and of philosophers who appeared to think that so long as they talked finely they might live contemptibly. Her quick impulses and "the most inflammable imagination since Sappho" led her to deeper ruin. She was capable of remorse, and not of amendment; of noble ideas, without the steadfastness to carry them into action. She was the ship without ballast, without compass, without chart, tossed by every wild gust of feeling—no anchor, no port to make for, and at the helm no guide.

She pointed, indeed, her own moral. She sold her soul for happiness, and gained fever, wretchedness, and despair. Her passions hid, even from her dreams, that better love in whose serene depths are mirrored peace, honour, and content: faithful affection for husband and children, the quiet striving after all things great, a noble life, and a happy death. D'Alembert, for whom she had long ceased to care, was true to her; de Mora died; Guibert was false (his fine *Éloge d'Éliza* rings as hollow as d'Alembert's "Lament" rings true). Her letters are only so many witnesses to her tragedy. It was she who spoke of "cette maladie si lente et si cruelle qu'on nomme la vie." "I have proved the truth of what Rousseau says: 'There are moments in life which have neither words nor tears.'" "How misery concentrates! One wants so little when one has lost all." "Diderot is right; it

is only the unhappy who know how to love;" and "To love and be loved is the happiness of heaven; when one has known it and lost it, there remains but to die."

She stands out, in brief, as one of the saddest instances in history of the disaster that must needs ensue where the paramount idea of life is not duty—that duty which can make the most unfortunate passion not all ignoble, and teach one to build on the ruins of one's own hopes a temple meet for the gods.

She stands out, too, as one of the most extraordinary social figures of the most remarkable social epoch the world has seen. She rose from nothing. She had no money. ("It is only the bored and the stupid who need to be rich," said she.) She had very bad health; and her lover, though he spoke of her as having that in her face beside which beauty is a "cold perfection," spoke not the less frankly of her *laideur*. Yet as long as the Salon is remembered, so long will be remembered the woman who ruled hers by the power of exquisite sympathy and the most womanly genius that ever woman had. And so long as there exist unrequited or misplaced affection, sin, suffering, and disappointment, so long will the letters of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse make their appeal to the heart.

MADAME GEOFFRIN

One of the intimates of Madame Geoffrin remarked one day in her Salon that everything was perfect *chez elle* except the cream.

"What will you?" said Madame. "I cannot change my milkwoman."

"Why not?"

"Because I have given her two cows."

"Voilà," says a biographer, "le rare et le délicat."

The incident was, indeed, quite characteristic of the woman whose motto was "Donner et pardonner," who had a tact that was almost genius, and a heart so kind, tender, honest, and generous that there is not one of the Salonières upon whose memory it is pleasanter to linger.

Marie Thérèse Rodet was born at Paris in 1699. She was, says one authority, the daughter of a *valet de chambre* of the Dauphine; while another has it that the valet was of Dauphigny. Everybody is agreed that her origin was entirely obscure and *bourgeoise.* Her parents died when she was in her cradle. She was brought up, but not educated, by a shrewd and illiterate old grandmother, who had a theory that if a woman is a fool learning will only accentuate her folly, and that

MADAME GEOFFRIN
Née le 2. Juin 1699. Morte à Paris le 6. Octobre 1777.
Son Eloge est dans le Cœur de tous ceux qui l'ont connue.

if she is clever she will do well enough without it. There is something to be said for this idea.

At fifteen Marie married a M. Geoffrin, who was also *bourgeois*, enormously wealthy, and a lieutenant-colonel of the National Guard. They had a daughter, afterwards the Marquise de la Ferté-Imbault. M. Geoffrin died. With the exception of one famous visit to the King of Poland at Warsaw, Madame never left Paris, even for a day. She held there the Salon which has made her famous, and died there full of years and honour in 1777.

This greatest of all the Salonières had, therefore, no history. That is, if outward events make a history. But there are some people who could write the incidents of their life on a thumb-nail, and who yet have known great emotions, exercised wide influence, and left behind them a more lasting reputation than many kings and dynasties. Perhaps Madame Geoffrin was one of these.

There are so few records of the early part of her life, that what she was in her brief girlhood is mostly a matter of conjecture. She does not seem to have wished to learn any more than the clever old grandmother wished to teach. She had no masters. She never even knew how to spell. But she was made to read—and to read much—and, what is better than all the reading in the world, to think. She was very little instructed in facts, and a great deal in principles; versed in no science but the science of human nature; shown how to look at things simply as they are; and

certainly not left in the arid condition of the *pédante* who, having stuffed her head full of information, leaves quite uncultivated her heart, her tact, her sympathy, and that deeper wisdom which is not of books. The little Marie, too, had always before her the example of the humorous and clear-minded old *bourgeoise*, who "talked so pleasantly of the things she did not know that no one ever wished she knew them better," and who at least, if results are to be trusted, showed the grandchild that noblest of the arts—how to live well.

Can't one fancy what a very bright, modest, sensible little girl this Marie was likely to have been when at fifteen she married her M. Geoffrin? The marriage seems to have been the usual *mariage de convenance*, inevitable at that date. Monsieur was a dull, heavy, honest, ugly person. There is one little story to the effect that in studying the Encyclopædia, printed in two columns, he read straight across the page, and remarked afterwards that the book seemed very fair, but a trifle obscure; and another little story to the effect that he would read the first volume of a history or book of travels, written in several volumes, over and over again, and then wonder that the author should so much repeat himself. The stories are not true, very likely; but if they are, one cannot but think that even this stupidity had, as it were, its own especial appeal to the wide, kindly heart of the girlish wife. It is only a very shallow cleverness that is annoyed at stupidity after all. It is your wise people who can

afford to treat it very gently—seeing how little it is the wisest can know—and who would have a fellow-feeling for that worthy, silent old manufacturer of ices (this was M. Geoffrin's trade) at the head of the table, trying vainly to catch the sense of the witty, elusive talk going on round him, and not a little thankful to get back to solitude, where he could be as unintellectual as he felt inclined, and practise comfortably on his *trompette marine* by the hour together.

There is no evidence to show that Madame did not treat Monsieur with at least as much sympathy and thoughtfulness as she treated all the world. He gave her great wealth, for which a woman who so loved to make others happy could not but be grateful. Her beautiful rooms were full of perfect statuary and pictures. She was enabled, and already beginning, to entertain her friends. This little *bourgeoise*, with her fine talent for order and decorum, must needs have regulated her husband's home well and happily. Though he was a nonentity, a respectable old figure-head to her guests, it does not follow he was nothing more to her. The stranger who inquired presently what had become of the old man who used to be at Madame's dinners, and was now there no more, and was met by the reply, "C'était mon mari; il est mort," represented the attitude towards M. Geoffrin of some of Madame's friends, but not that of Madame herself.

It is said that she received what may be called her training for her Salon from the clever and corrupt

Madame de Tencin. That may have been. No training, however brilliant, could have fitted a woman unfitted in heart and character to be, not merely the hostess, but the friend, confidante, mother as it were, of the most brilliant genius of the eighteenth century.

The Salon of Madame Geoffrin is one of the wonders of the social world. She had no position. She could claim as father a *valet de chambre* in an age when the aristocracy would not touch the *canaille* with the tips of their white fingers. She was wealthy, indeed, but in a time when all the *noblesse* were also wealthy (with their rich places and perquisites and blood-money from the taxes), so that there was not then, as now, an acknowledged aristocracy of bullion. Her *trompette marine*, with his fortune made in trade, was no great help to her. She was not beautiful. She had little, gentle, old-maidish ways that never even let her seem young. She was respectable when decorum of manner was highly unpopular and taken to be a tacit reproach, in the very worst taste, upon modish levity. She was, as has been seen, uneducated.

And to her rooms soon flocked *savants*, philosophers, artists, nobles, princes, ambassadors, politicians, reformers. On Monday one dined here—the perfection of a little dinner, simple, suitable, well chosen — the guests mostly painters and sculptors. What did Madame know about art? Nothing, except what a refined natural taste could teach her. On Wednesdays the dinner was literary—Marmontel, Holbach, d'Alem-

bert, Gibbon, Hume, Horace Walpole, and the only woman besides the hostess, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. Can't one hear the conversation? Madame Geoffrin had the supreme art of making other people talk their best. She knew just where to put in a word or to ask a question. She had in perfection that finer accomplishment—how to listen. She might very well have known more about books than she did. But it was impossible that she should have sympathised better with the makers of books, their hopes, cares, fears, ambition. These men told her their difficulties. She advised them, helped them, cheered them. She was their good angel — quite a human good angel, with that prim exactness about her dress, lavender-scented, dainty, quiet, with her spotless muslins about her neck, the little cap tied under her chin—the very soul of gentle good sense, gay, kind, wise, natural, orderly.

After the dinners she received all her world. What an assembly it was! This Salon was at once the most catholic and the most particular of all the Salons. Here, it is said, sovereigns met their people. The aristocracy of genius was brought close to the aristocracy of birth. Was one clever, poor, obscure, or titled and famous? The two met on common ground and were both the better. Here were Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, Algarotti, and Lord Shelbourne. Stanislas Augustus, afterwards King of Poland, was a "host" of the company, and brought in his train the Polish nobles

and notabilities of the day. Here d'Alembert met often his fatal passion, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. Here was Grimm, who had come straight from another and a very different Salon and influence, that of his mistress, Madame d'Épinay. Horace Walpole, perhaps, had been at Madame du Deffand's.

In this corner one was complimenting Bernardin de Saint-Pierre on his *Paul et Virginie*, "that swan song of old dying France." In another there was a group of laughing girls, for Madame loved such as they loved her. Women of fashion talked with the rugged old *bourgeois* reformers, who first of all should have reformed *their* class and character. The broken French of those "foreigners of distinction," who never passed through Paris without visiting Madame Geoffrin, was audible everywhere. Vanloo and Vernet were looking at the priceless pictures and statuary, bought out of the *trompette's* ice-money. And over all, the genius of good taste, good order, good sense, presided that woman who was well called the "invisible Providence" of her assemblies, Madame Geoffrin.

Though she must have been very young when she first began to receive a society more illustrious than any since the days of Madame de Rambouillet, she had from the very first the quiet sageness of middle life, and that aversion to change, hastiness, and discord which one does not associate with youth. Were they talking politics? Madame knew nothing of politics. They made people bitter, argumentative, quarrelsome.

She listened a little while, then, when the discussion grew too heated, interposed with her "Voilà qui est bien." That was her oil on troubled waters, her password to harmony, fairness, and reason. In her rooms there was always a calm, though it were but the calm before the storm. The distant rumble of the thunder of that tempest that was soon to burst over France was not heard in this quiet place. By Madame's fireside, indeed, and under Madame's peaceful influence, one whispered of those doctrines which would presently *bouleverser* the world. But it was the writers, not the actors, of that great drama who gathered here, and when they got too fiery and hot-headed in their discussions, as some needs must, they drifted away naturally from the gathering of Madame Geoffrin to the greater liberty allowed by Holbach and Helvétius.

Madame had a little supper-party for a few chosen intimates when her world had gone away. She did not even now talk much herself—only interposed now and then with a gay little story or a kind little axiom. All her sayings were kind, it seems. It is not so difficult to be witty if one is permitted to be a little bitter too. But to be witty, and to see persistently the best side of people and motives, is by no means so easy. If Madame had believed less in her friends she could not have helped them half so much. It is not hard to understand why these impulsive, brilliant Frenchmen came to this wise little *bourgeoise* with their confidences and confessions. She scolded them well, *à part*, when the

supper was over; but she understood them perfectly, and had the charity that believeth and hopeth all things, and that makes the most fallen once more believe and hope in himself.

All her friends were not, of course, brilliant people. Was it Madame Geoffrin Shenstone was thinking of in particular when he wrote of the Frenchwoman in general?—"There is a quality in which no woman in the world can compete with her—it is the power of intellectual irritation. She will draw wit out of a fool." There is a charming story told of Madame Geoffrin, who found herself *tête-à-tête* for a whole long winter evening with a worthy and unsufferable old bore of an abbé. What was to be done? Yawn in each other's faces? Die of *tristesse* and ennui under a mask of social smiles? Madame, "inspired by the desperate situation," set herself to work to make the bore amusing; and succeeded so well that when he left her she gave him a little compliment on his "bonne conversation." "Madame," said he, "I am only the instrument on which you have played beautifully."

This was the key at once to her character and to her social success. She "played beautifully" the noble music of the great masters on instruments from which others only extracted the vile jingle of street songs or the fierce passions of the "Marseillaise." She did not only draw cleverness from the stupid, but goodness from the corrupt. Instead of the licence and indecency of the gatherings of Mademoiselle Quinault,

there were her modest little suppers, where even Burigny, her dear major-domo, was not required to keep order, because she knew so well how to keep it herself. She still stands out, with her carefully regulated home and her serene mind, as the noblest high-priestess of decency and right. She still gives the lie to the delusion (which even now obtains in her country, if one must judge by its fiction and plays) that virtue *must* be stupid. If in reading of her, with that lack of events in her history and that gentle regularity in her daily life, she seems dull even for a moment, the fault lies only with her biographer, and not with the woman who for fifty years was as a mother, beloved, worshipped, honoured by the most brilliant spirits of her age.

It was in her own Salon that she first learnt that affection, which she carried with her to her grave, for Stanislas Augustus Poniatowski, afterwards King of Poland. He appears to have been an honest, well-intentioned person, not at all incapable of warm feelings, or at all adequate to the tremendous situation in which he found himself. To Madame he was her *fils* and her *bien aimé*. A prince? A king-elect? A king? What did that matter? He was first of all, as it were, her son. She had the gift of looking straight through the trappings of royalty, fame, position, at the man within them.

In 1764 the Cabinets of Petersburg and Berlin set him on the Polish throne, and Madame wrote to him

as "Sire" and "Majesty," and regarded him for ever as the child who wanted help and sympathy on a difficult way, with whom one might quarrel a little, but whom, feeble or strong, in or out of power, one must needs love to the end.

The letters the pair exchanged are not remarkable as literary compositions. Madame's are full of the faults of orthography for which she was famous. They have very few of the blithe little anecdotes and epigrams which made her conversation delightful. She was writing to a man always in danger, fear, difficulty; and was herself the most sympathetic of women. So what would one have? They have no great political interest, or only that feminine view of politics which always centres on the politician. But they are not the less letters which even a king might have been glad to have received. If any one will look back on some cherished correspondence of his own, he will find in it, it may be pretty safely said, less wit and brilliancy even than Stanislas found in Madame Geoffrin's. It is only posterity which demands cleverness, and comment on contemporary history in a letter; the receiver only needs the touch of the writer's hand, the assurance of affection and faithfulness, and the reminder that the only real separation is that which causes no pain.

Madame had been corresponding with her son and king only a few months when the idea of visiting him at Warsaw took possession of her heart. She was now sixty-five years old. She had never been out of Paris

in her life. She had preferred her *ruisseau de la rue de Saint-Honoré* to all the splendid places of the world. The difficulties of travelling in that time are hardly estimable. She had no one to go with her. Her daughter was married and had her own ties. Madame had to tear herself from a Salon of perhaps forty years' standing. But the idea grew, and then dominated her. She and her king had a quarrel on paper, and the scheme seemed likely to be abandoned. They had a reconciliation, and their reunion was the necessary consequence. One has to be a woman, perhaps, and to understand that maternal yearning in every woman's heart, to realise the absorbing nature of the desire to see her *bien aimé* again which made Madame Geoffrin pursue her plan against everybody's advice, and carry it out in the teeth of difficulty. Her *bien aimé* himself had been more than a little doubtful about his *chère maman* attempting a journey so hazardous. He had warned her often of the drawbacks she would find. He would do his best for her—she should be infinitely honoured and beloved—but drawbacks there would be; and she paid no attention to his cautions—or, rather, listened to them and persisted.

In the end of June 1766, escorted by the Comte de Loyko, chamberlain to Stanislas, Madame Geoffrin, *bourgeoise*, started with an almost royal progress, and with, it is said, the eyes of Europe upon her, on the first stage of her travels. Can't one see her looking

out from the windows of that *berline*, built for the occasion, upon the new world? A widely travelled generation can hardly fancy the excitement and eagerness, doubt, fear, anticipation which such a journey must have represented in the mind of a woman who belonged to the most stay-at-home people of a stay-at-home age. And behold, this was Vienna! Not Paris, indeed, but not all contemptible. Madame parted here from Loyko, who was replaced by the Captain Bachone, who spoke all languages, and was prepared, it appears, to travel with suites of furniture, cooks, provisions, silver plate, to render Madame's journey as little inconvenient as might be. At Vienna the greatest nobility of the land received this clever, dignified daughter of the people with their very best parties and welcome. Maria Theresa showed her the finest kindness and sympathy. She saw all the Austrian Royal Family—"the prettiest thing one can imagine"—at Schoenbrunn. Here was the young Marie Antoinette, hardly twelve years old, and already lovely as an angel. "The Archduchess told me to write to France and say I have seen her, this little one, and find her beautiful." Was this the first footstep of that grim destiny which was to overtake "the Austrian," falling on the threshold of her life? "Arrière-petite-fille du roi de France." "Lovely as an angel." "Write to your country and say you found her so." It would have been but a part of the fitness of fate that one of the first little nails in the coffin of

monarchy and of the queen should have been driven there by the daughter of a *valet de chambre.*

Madame would have been sorry to leave Vienna, no doubt, if she could have had room for such a feeling as sorrow in her heart when she was getting nearer every hour to this son of her age and her affection. She had expressed herself so warmly and decidedly in that quarrel they had had! She was so anxious to see him, and tell him that she would not have been half so angry if she had loved him less. To her serene nature the omnipotence of fate or death to dash the cup of realisation from one's lips, even at the last moment, was not so vivid as to a less sanguine temperament. She looked forward to their meeting with a sure heart. They were to be so happy, son and mother once more—a French son and mother, be it understood, between whom is that intimacy and confidence not half so well known to the relationship in other countries. He was to tell her what he had done, was doing, was going to do. They would talk over his marriage, his prospects, his thousand daily difficulties in that stormy kingdom, which needed the strongest man at its head, and had a very amiable one. She would advise him, scold him, help him. She did not know much about his Polish politics, but she could learn. She was all for him, and not at all for herself. She wanted no advancement, no place for her friends, no influence used here or word spoken there—nothing but the good of one person, Stanislas Augustus Poniatowski.

No one who has lived long in the world will wonder that this meeting at Warsaw did not fulfil all it promised. It is a truism, but not less a truth, that the only unalloyed happiness in life is anticipation, and that the happiest people are those whose dreams are unrealised. These two, who loved each other sincerely, disagreed upon a thousand minor and immaterial points, as many other sincere lovers have done before and after them. They could not consent to differ. (Has one ever met a woman who could let a man think differently from her without dragging that difference to the fore, and discussing and threshing it out a hundred times a day?) Madame suffered not a little. Stanislas lodged her with splendour and honour. She obtained —if that was any advantage—a very good idea of the tottering state of this poor little kingdom, torn by internal dissension, the plaything of the greater Powers. She received during her stay in Poland letters from Voltaire and Marmontel. Her whole visit there lasted only a little more than two months. When she was back again in Paris she was able to write of it with enthusiasm. But there were not the less those clouds on her happiness. When she had gone away Stanislas wrote in terms of a passionate regret, and she answered him from Vienna that the "tu" in which he addressed her was an "illusion of Satan," and recalled "all that I have suffered." There had been, it is said, influences at work upon the king which Madame dreaded for him, and of which she could not persuade him to rid himself.

They would love each other better when they were separated. It is from a distance that one obtains the best view of a city. Too near, one sees the defects of a part, and not the beauty of the whole.

The pair resumed their correspondence with all their old fervour when Madame was back again in her Paris. She sympathised once more with all Stanislas' difficulties and trials, which did not get fewer as the years went on. She was now, as ever, the genius of common-sense and quiet reason — calm, far-seeing, judicious. Petty jealousies were quite forgotten in the very real and daily growing need Stanislas had of her faithful friendship. In 1769 she was able to write to him, "When one is young, one's pleasure, passions, tastes even, form attachments and break them. My feeling for you depends on none of these things; therefore it has lasted. It has lasted in spite of candour and plain speaking, and will last to the end of my life."

Madame was now seventy years old. Famine, financial disorder, and parties in the Court and Government, who sacrificed the public good to gratify private malice, made the condition of France appear deplorable, even to a woman whose nature was at all times gently optimistic. But the misfortunes of her own country were light beside those of her king's.

In 1772 took place the first partition of Poland. By 1792, when the second partition broke Poniatowski's heart, and he retired to Petersburg, to live there till his death in 1798 with, it is said, no consolation but that

taste for letters he had learnt of Madame Geoffrin, she had long gone the way of all flesh. She wrote to him so long as she could handle a pen, loved him as long as she had a heart to love with, and in her last letter to him told him that she could not express her joy at leaving him happy and content. So that even Fate is sometimes merciful.

The close of Madame Geoffrin's life was like its beginning, well ordered and regular. She continued to receive her friends in her Salon when she was a very old woman. In the summer of 1776 she was attacked by paralysis. The attack was brought on, say some, by too close an attendance at a church festival. It may have been. Though Madame had been the intimate of the philosophers, had listened many times in her rooms to the free expression of free-thought, and had been a warm patroness of the Encyclopædia, yet it was not a little in keeping with the tranquil conservatism of her character that orthodoxy should have claimed her at last. Her daughter, Madame la Marquise de la Ferté-Imbault, who was properly aristocratic and conventional, took possession of her mother's bed, and would not let those adventurous souls, Morellet, d'Alembert, Marmontel, come near it. The sick woman was past troubling at their exclusion; or, perhaps, like many others, after having in life reasoned and wondered, was glad to die in the bosom of that Church whose great attraction to the soul is that it admits no doubts, saying with that self-confidence which gives confidence, "Be-

hold, I am the Truth! Rest in me." Madame at least only smiled when she learned that her daughter was thus "guarding her tomb from the infidels." It was thought that her reason was dimmed a little. But she was able to make her preparations for death *gaiement*, almost as she had made them for her journey to Poland. She had been always gently cheerful, and she was cheerful now. When she overheard the people about her bed making fine suggestions of the means Government might employ to make the masses happy, she roused herself to say: "Ajoutez-y le soin de procurer les plaisirs." It was her last recorded utterance.

The character of Madame Geoffrin is quite simple. She was less a great woman than a good one. A great woman is the phœnix who rises from the ashes of her sex's littleness once in a thousand years, and is in proportion to great men about one to a hundred. Madame did not electrify the world. But she left her corner of it fairer, kinder, wiser; made by her character and influence a cool oasis, very pleasant to rest in, in the desert of French philosophy, atheism, and immorality.

A thousand stories are told of her generosity, her tact, her honesty. The very people whom her *bourgeois* decorum and soberness must most have reproached could not but like her. "I am so crazy, and she is so prudent," wrote Galiani to Madame Necker. "Still I love her, I esteem her, I reverence her, I adore her." Others, if none more contemptible and licentious than the witty abbé, had the same feeling.

Horace Walpole called her his director, his confessor, the embodiment of common-sense. To be censured by the Sorbonne, or shut up in the Bastille for one's violent opinions, was almost the only form of folly Madame could not forgive her friends.

Quiet was the chief of her household gods. Speaking to Diderot of a lawsuit that was bothering her: "Get done with my lawsuit," said she. "They want money? I have it. Give them money. What better use can I make of my money than to buy peace with it?"

She did, indeed, make better use of it even than that. She is the most generous woman in history. It was she who allowed Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, who had no kind of claim upon her, a pension for life. It was she who paid Poniatowski's debts when he first came, a young man and a foolish one, to Paris. When she visited her friends it was her tender pleasure to look round their rooms and see what was wanting to completeness, and afterwards to contribute a piece of old china, a picture, a couch, or a bureau. She had such a delight in giving, that he would have been surly indeed who could have refused to accept.

To Morellet and to Thomas she made a sufficient allowance "pour leur faire une existence indépendante." How many more of those poor devils of authors who frequented her Salon, and had such very fine notions on life and so very little idea how to live, she helped from that wide purse and heart, one can only guess. One Sunday—on Sundays she did not receive her friends—

one of them took her by surprise, and found her doing up a considerable sum of money in little bags for distribution among the poor. It was her regular Sunday occupation. For here, in evil Paris, with its great gulf fixed between class and class, there were so many sick who needed the necessaries—of death—so many orphaned babies, so many despairing women! If Madame, who did "good by stealth," was convicted of so much kindness, how much more must there have been of which no one knew! She was fond of quoting that Eastern proverb: "Si tu fais du bien jette-le dans la mer, et si les poissons l'avalent Dieu s'en souviendra;" and when she was found out in goodness, past denial, excused herself by saying, with her gay little smile, she had only *l'humeur donnante.*

But she had, indeed, that nobler generosity of soul of which giving is but a small part. It was Madame who first stretched out a hand of friendship to Madame Necker, whom as yet the other women would not accept. And it was Madame who remained her friend when the Necker, who was, besides, young and handsome, presided over a dangerously successful rival Salon. It was Madame Geoffrin who was, in brief, beloved of women, though she was also beloved of men; who could not bear the false change of compliments, eulogy, flattery, and clung instead to the frank affection of that generous youth, to whom, as to childhood, all men are equal, and all the world seems kind.

There is no prettier picture than that Madame herself

draws, with her natural illiterate pen, in one of the letters to Stanislas. Among her closest friends were a troop of laughing girls, who came and took her by surprise when they wanted to be amused. It was not here, volatile youth that was to cheer old age, but this gently gay old age ("Mon cœur n'a que vingt ans," said Madame) which was to make youth merrier yet. One may imagine the scene. They cluster round her, chattering and impulsive. They are so light-hearted and demonstrative, so eager to make confidences, so susceptible of influence! They have come to stay *ever* so long. They must insist on having supper with her—on spending the lengthiest and gayest of evenings. At their head was a girlish Madame d'Egmont—twenty years old at the most—who was quite irresistible, said Madame, when she looked up into one's face and talked, and who had "a grace and vivacity which neither sculpture nor painting shall pourtray." The description of her was so charming that Stanislas wanted her portrait. She died, poor soul! in the sequel, still only a girl, and childless. On that evening death and disaster must have seemed far off enough. For Madame, though she was old and had suffered, had the supreme unselfishness which communicates all its joys, and keeps its sorrows to itself. She laughed with her visitors, and scolded them tenderly after her fashion. "I scold them on the way they waste their youth," she said, "and preach to them that they may have an old age as bright and healthy as mine," and gave them, perhaps, that senten-

tious little maxim, at which they all laughed delightfully at the moment, and thought over a little afterwards: "There are three things that the women of Paris throw out of the window—their time, their health, and their money."

Is it not a pretty, natural little scene in the coarse, clever, artificial drama of this French eighteenth century? Madame Geoffrin was in her own person a witness to the quiet good that always lives on through the worst periods of noisy vice. She should be remembered for ever, if only as the type and voice of those silent multitudes who follow duty in the basest age, and in the teeth of a low public opinion struggle towards ideals not mean.

MADAME D'ÉPINAY

In the group of brilliant women who "ruled Paris through their Salons," there was not one so characteristic of the worst side of that great eighteenth century as Madame d'Épinay. In her one sees its sublime self-deceit, after which all sin is easy. She had in full measure its charm, its cleverness, and its folly; its fine talk and its mean practice; its feeling for beauty and truth, and its "windy sentimentalism," which led away from both. From her rooms came a hot air feverish with debate. Here it was always candle-light, with no cold clear morning to search the shams. Here every woman was in love with the wrong man, and every man in love with the wrong woman. The worst crime was forgivable if the sinner sinned wittily. And out of her portrait the presiding genius of this little world looks down the century with the falsest smiling face that ever woman had. For Madame d'Épinay was light to her soul.

As she was also the friend of the great men of a famous age, listened to Voltaire, Grimm, Galiani, Diderot, Duclos, Holbach, Rousseau, and wrote memoirs to record what she had heard, she has no slight claim on remembrance.

Madame D'Epinay.

Louise Florence Pétronville d'Esclavelles was born in 1726. Her father was governor of Valenciennes, and lived there with his wife and child until his death. Then Madame brought up the little Louise to Paris for an education; gave her M. d'Affry as a tutor (Louise attached herself to him with a charming childish affection), and returned herself to Valenciennes, leaving the little daughter to be brought up, with a large party of cousins, by her Aunt and Uncle Bellegarde.

Judiciousness does not seem to have been the distinguishing feature of Louise's early training. Madame d'Esclavelles was a severe, righteous woman—hard and fast rules and sharp punishments. She inspired in the little girl the fear which is but too prone to protect itself by white lies. When Louise had been long a married woman, she was still in no small awe of her mother, nay, had, up to the time of Madame's death—though she was a tender daughter and a devoted—the shrinking of the weak nature before the strong.

Uncle Bellegarde seems to have been particularly kind, and Aunt Bellegarde distinctly disagreeable. Louise formed devoted youthful friendships with her girl cousins, and wrote affectionate careful letters (careful, remembering he was her dear tutor, and would not expect faults of style and expression) to M. d'Affry. Then she went for a little while to a convent. When she came out of it she was no longer a child, but a charming girl, not pretty (but then a Frenchwoman does not need beauty to make her attractive), with

great dark eyes in a very pale, thin, animated, and expressive face. As there was a boy cousin a good deal at home, Louise, of course, immediately fell in love with him. She confided her passion to his married sisters, who, to do them justice, warned her quite openly of their brother's real character—of his "rare facility" for lying, his expensive, gay tastes, and notoriety for worse wickedness. Louise was not in the least disillusioned, of course. She had the most obstinate youthful infatuation. To be sure this delightful M. de la Live did not at all care for her at present. But he would—he must. M. de la Live—he presently changed his name to d'Épinay—was, in point of fact, not long proof against the very evident admiration of his charming little cousin, and having just, and most conveniently, been made *fermier général*, married her at St. Roch. Louise was nineteen.

The young pair continued, after the French fashion, to live with M. de Bellegarde. Madame Bellegarde was now dead, so Madame d'Esclavelles had taken her place in the house. The d'Épinays began their married life with that abandon to passion which goes before disenchantment more certainly than pride before a fall. On the very first day they had the most charming coquettish quarrel about rouge. Was Louise to put it on, like other women of her time, or not? Mamma said no. M. d'Épinay, yes. Between these two s minded people Louise really could not tell in the how to act. She gives the most vivacious little ac

of the scene herself. She was in the heyday of a very brief delight—young, attractive, beloved. One can read between the lines the pleasure of her gay little heart, and cannot but feel sad for the happiness that had no stamina to keep it alive.

The pair after a time, and not a little in opposition to the wishes of Madame d'Esclavelles, very naturally liked to go out and enjoy themselves. M. d'Épinay seems to have taken possession of Louise's character, as mamma took possession of it in her childhood. She was, just now at least, more afraid of him than of her mother, and, besides, wanted to go to those balls and parties where her brightness and vivacity made her more admired than all the regular, dull beauty in Paris. So they ignored mamma's strictness, and presently, and in the very greatest excitement, gave a ball themselves.

They had been married about a year when Louise discovered, what the warnings of her sisters-in-law had failed to make her realise, the true nature of the man she had married. It is difficult to fancy a more contemptible person than this gay, easy, pleasant, extravagant, self-indulgent, light-hearted *fermier général.* M. d'Épinay was never troubled all his life long by a scruple. He had not the faintest sense of responsibility. He was more cheerfully and good-naturedly wicked than any other Frenchman in history. He did she ed plan to avoid right and practise wrong. He cha saw no difference between them.

does Louise was a very young wife, and had been, poor

soul, happy but such a very short time, the shrieks and faintings with which she first learnt of her husband's faithlessness may be well forgiven her. M. Jully, her brother-in-law, comforted her by saying, "What does it signify? He won't love you any less in his heart." M. d'Épinay himself also thought it really did not matter. Louise always ended by sharing the opinion of the people she was with. So she put on a very pretty frock and a little colour on to her pale cheeks, felt quite bright again, and they all went to a delightful ball at the opera.

She had a better consolation when in the September of 1746 her little son was born to her. There was a great deal of natural affection in this not very profound little heart, it seems. Madame was delightfully fond and proud of the baby, and wanted very much to keep him with her instead of putting him out to be nursed, after the unnatural fashion of the time. "Que voilà une de ces folles idées!" wrote M. d'Épinay, who was away making his duty *tour en province*. So Louise yielded, as she always yielded. It was while Monsieur was on this tour, and his wife was still calling him her "angel," and finding his absence "insupportable," that she discovered by chance one day at a Paris jeweller's that the "angel" had been giving his portrait mounted in pearls to Some Other Person. When she taxed him with this faithlessness when he came home, he laughed and stopped her mouth with a kiss. "What difference does it make to you?" he said, just as M. Jully had

said. "However fond I am of others, I shall always be fondest of you." It was a fine consolation. There is not a little significance in the fact that as M. d'Épinay, gay, self-pleased, and débonnaire, went out of the room laughing, M. de Francueil, who was to play so fatal a part in the wife's life, entered it.

The whole scene is quite characteristic of that "Age of Persiflage" which was even now rushing, drunk with wit and pleasure, blinded by its own lightness, its specious talking and evil-doing, upon the naked swords of the Terror.

Louise, since that gay, faithless husband left her so much, began in a sort of self-defence to form friendships on her own account. There was Madame d'Arty, who had no reputation to speak of, and who one night took Louise (Louise wanting to go, and half afraid, and planning feeble little excuses for her naughtiness in her own mind all the time) to a gay surreptitious supper with the inspector of the opera. M. d'Épinay was dreadfully angry when he found out about the adventure. It was not wicked. It was worse. It was *inconvenable*. Of what could Madame d'Arty be thinking? It was Monsieur himself who introduced his wife to the friendship of the notorious Mademoiselle d'Ette, who was so shameless, so clever, and so abandoned—with her exquisite complexion of milk and roses, and her girlish airs of timidity—that of all the base actions of the *fermier général's* life this introduction was perhaps the basest.

Mademoiselle took possession of the little Madame immediately. She established herself *chez* Épinay. Monsieur was away. She sat at work with Louise—those endless tapestries and embroideries which were the fashion of the day—looked up from the frame, perhaps, with her beautiful false eyes, to see how much she might dare to say to this weaker woman, for how strong a poison the feeble soul was fit. Louise adored her, and confided in her. (Louise went on adoring and confiding in the latest comer nearly all her life.) Mademoiselle told her own shameful history, adding complacently, as comment, "In all that youth and lightness made me do, there is nothing, thank God, for which I need blush."

When M. de Francueil called and bent over Louise's little hand, and brought to bear upon her very susceptible heart the charms of his cultivated intelligence and of his handsome face, the little devil of the embroidery frame (there is no other word that quite fits Mademoiselle d'Ette) saw the means to get Madame into her power, and used them. The next day, perhaps, she told Louise the further true story of M. d'Épinay's infidelities. The wife repudiated the insinuations—listened, doubted, believed. There seems no very specific reason why Mademoiselle should have wished to ruin her friend. That Madame dared to be still innocent while Mademoiselle was corrupt to the core, may have been reason enough.

In June 1747 Louise had a little daughter. By the

time she returned to Paris and her husband joined her again, the influence of the friend he had given her had sunk deep into her soul. She complained plaintively of the dreadful ennui of having to feign pleasure at the reunion, when she could not feel it. Their marriage was stripped of the last rag of illusion. From henceforward all intimacy between husband and wife was at an end.

One can well imagine that Louise's frame of mind when she went to her husband's place, La Chevrette, with her children, her father-in-law and his household, was not a little dangerous. She was young, deceived, susceptible. She was under the influence of a bad woman. She was deplorably weak. When M. de Bellegarde invited Francueil to stay there with them, it must have seemed like a decree of destiny. But then as ever, "character is destiny," one must remember.

Francueil was one of the most brilliant figures of the eighteenth century. He was a musician and an actor of no mean order, and had the finest literary taste and judgment. He was receiver-general, had a large fortune, delightful manners, an agreeable person, and a complete incapacity for any kind of fidelity. He had at this time a wife in the background, but she does not seem to have counted, and was, in fact, dismissed, as it were, from consideration by a man who was once Francueil's secretary, and was to be the greatest man of his age, in the words *bien laide, bien douce.*

A very vivid imagination is not needed to picture the

life at La Chevrette. Francueil taught Madame composition and harmony. The bright pupil looked up into the tutor's handsome face and learnt there what is not written in text-books. A woman can find, if she likes, a personal application in algebra or in Greek roots. One may be sure Louise was not long in discovering a very human side to the lessons of this brilliant preceptor. She told him presently — with bewitching tears, no doubt—the history of her husband's falseness. It is hard to say whether she was more charming when she was softly gay or softly sad. The pair were soon vowing an eternal "pure" and "disinterested friendship." They took long walks, when they discussed the problems of the heart and soul—the heart and soul meaning, of course, those particular organs which belonged to Madame d'Épinay and M. de Francueil. When they came home after these rambles, half guilty, half happy, there was Mademoiselle d'Ette with her evil smile, knowing everything, and working to the vile end quietly in the background, and M. de Bellegarde good-humoured and unconscious.

Everything was against them—the dangerous philosophies both had imbibed, the low public opinion of their age, base friends, bad examples, their own characters. Louise denied herself to the lover for a day or two, wept, fainted, and wrote, "Go, go; I will never forgive you"—and forgave. It is a very old, shameful story, with the same end always.

There is, perhaps, no worse testimony against Madame

d'Épinay than the account she herself gives of this episode in her Memoirs. Her pretty self-complacency is just ruffled. It is as if she would say, "A little imprudent, a little unwise, but *so* naïve, *so* impulsive, *so* warm-hearted!" When M. de Francueil brought down a little troupe of actors to La Chevrette, the charming novelty dismissed from this light soul the last faint shadow of uneasiness which might have remained to trouble its peace. Louise was quickly discovered to be the most *piquante* of amateur actresses, with, it is said, something in her voice, eyes, smile that moved the heart. Madame de Maupeou, her sister-in-law, was also delightfully *piquante* in the part of a servant, Lisette — so *piquante*, in fact, that M. de Maupeou forbade her to act any more. (The attitude of most of these wives towards their husbands was pretty well described by Francueil when he wrote to Louise, "C'est que votre mari est un monstre et vous une adorable créature.") The young people rehearsed and coquetted and amused themselves very well indeed. M. de Bellegarde and Madame d'Esclavelles permitted the frivolity in the hope that it might distract Louise from the melancholy thoughts of her husband's infidelity.

She was sufficiently distracted, it seems. The play was a comedy entitled *L'Engagement téméraire*, and one night Francueil presented to the troupe the author, one Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "as poor as Job

and with wit and vanity enough for four." Rousseau was at this time thirty-seven years old—coward, liar, sensualist, genius. It was only the genius which Madame d'Épinay and her friends regarded. That covered all sins. The charming *comédiennes* flattered him, no doubt, to the top of his bent, and he answered them, after his kind, with brutality and insult, so that they must needs worship the more. Through his comedy ran all the time that other comedy of the loves of Francueil and Louise, and in the background, watching always, Mademoiselle d'Ette wrote her view of the proceedings to her Chevalier Vallory.

Among the easy lies which stole into these Memoirs of Madame d'Épinay there were, most naturally, also many suppressions of fact. In 1750 was born her daughter, Pauline, whom Madame, with but too good reasons, tried to confuse with the child born in 1747. But if it is the consequences of evil-doing which ruin reputation, it is the evil itself which ruins the soul. It seems to matter very little whether in such a case Madame spoke the truth or not. The sin was sinned.

It was in this same year that Louise was introduced to the society of Mademoiselle Quinault. The Quinault was a wit, entirely without a moral sense, and with a taste for clever company and doubtful jokes. Francueil called her "la Ninon du siècle." At her house, twice a week, met a little party as clever as any in Paris. Here one night was M.

Duclos, who was to be Secretary of the Academy and historiographer of France, and who was already the man who could, or at any rate did, say anything —trenchant, despotic, domineering. Here was the Marquis de Saint-Lambert, soldier, poet, philosopher, cultivated man of the world, and lover of that Madame d'Houdetot, Louise's sister-in-law, who was afterwards the original of Rousseau's "Julie" in *Héloise*. Louise herself brought to the party ("we were only five") youth, charm, sympathy; that engaging weakness which always made her agree with the last speaker, and that accommodating conscience which was hurt by no vileness prettily expressed. The Quinault's little niece was sent away at the dessert. One wanted to say everything that came into one's head. The hostess was not going to have any restriction on her coarse pleasantries. When the conversation turned on the decency of going without clothes, Louise weakly thought for a minute the subject a little unsuitable—"but then, M. de Saint-Lambert puts into it reflections so grave, so exalted!" The remark is inimitably characteristic of the woman. A new poem by Voltaire was introduced presently—on whose merits the little gathering differed charmingly—and another evening, when Rousseau was of the company, they discussed atheism. They touched all subjects with a cleverness not a little seductive and extraordinary, and expressed their theories with such a brilliancy that there is no wonder that the theorists as well

as their listeners were too dazzled to see the truth. It was only Rousseau (though he was a beast, he had something of the freedom and naturalness of a beast of the field) who brought into this world of shams and artifices that enthusiastic earnestness which characterised all his emotions while they lasted.

"As for me, sir," said he, "I believe in God." And when Saint-Lambert spoke of such a faith as the "origin of all the follies," "Messieurs," said Rousseau, "if you say another word I go." And later, "I cannot bear this rage for destruction. . . . The idea of a God is necessary to happiness."

Louise was on the side of faith, too. But "we only believe as deep as we live" after all. She had a charming fit of repentance presently for her poor light little life: confessed all the "chagrins que m'avait donné mon mari" to the Abbé Martin; for a few days wanted dreadfully to be a Carmelite, and was a little deterred from the plan by the Abbé telling her that God was not to be made a *pis aller*, and a great deal deterred by the fact that the world (where, said M. Martin, lay her duty) was really more attractive after all.

By this time M. d'Épinay's extravagances had necessitated a *separation de biens* between husband and wife. Madame now began to receive her friends regularly twice a week for music, and to read or play comedies. Duclos came to stay at La Chevrette,

half fell in love with Louise, and got her quite into his coarse power by making her tell him the story of her love for Francueil. Mademoiselle d'Ette, who was still *chez* Épinay, hated Duclos, and fought him, as it were, for the mastery over the little Madame. Louise was the shuttlecock between two players. If she had been a good woman, her weakness would have ruined her past hope. As it was——

Francueil grew cold presently, which, with his temperament, might very well have been expected. Louise wept over his coldness to Mademoiselle d'Ette, looked up through tears and saw—or thought she saw—that Mademoiselle herself had a passion for Francueil. Louise was soon writing (very likely not at all unjustly) of that dearest confidante and bosom friend: "Who knows if she is not now my husband's spy? . . . I have so many reasons to suspect her."

At a supper party at Madame Jully's, Francueil, who was intoxicated, dropped a note Louise had given him in front of M. d'Épinay. The hostess, who had had on her own account a pretty little experience in intrigue, picked up the note and saved the situation. It was thought that M. d'Épinay had incited Francueil to drink, in order that he might make admissions derogatory to Louise. It may have been true, perhaps. In this society nothing was too vile to be possible. Madame's intimates were now Rousseau, Gauffecourt, Duclos, Madame de Jully,

Chevalier Vallory, and Mademoiselle d'Ette. In that list there was no person clean, honourable, or virtuous. It was not until Rousseau introduced Grimm to the party (though even Grimm, Heaven knows, did not reach an over-exalted standard of moral perfection) that one could breathe at all in that tainted air.

Grimm was at this time still a young man. He was the friend of Holbach and Diderot, as well as of Rousseau. He was of German extraction, with some of the solidity of the Teutonic character combined with the taste and polish of the Frenchman. He was already an *habitué* of the salons of Madame Geoffrin and the Duke of Orleans. He was the favourite of Catharine of Russia, and had begun his *Correspondance Littéraire*. In character he seems to have been strong, melancholy, and reserved—the man who was, as it were, always superior to the situation, hard and excellent in counsel, fixed in idea, cool and wise in judgment, firm, clear-seeing, and ambitious.

Since Louise had now broken with her lover, as her lover, it was inevitable that she should fall under a new command.

It would seem to be in the nature of the noblest women, as the weakest, never to know rest or happiness until they have met their master. Only in the one case it is too hard to find him, and in the other too easy. One may be thankful that it

was Grimm who now dominated this little Madame, instead of another d'Épinay or a Francueil.

She began by asking him to her concerts. He had a passionate love of music, as well as that cultivated taste for art, science, and literature. One night he heard her name insulted, fought a duel for its honour (alas! poor soiled little name), was wounded, and had earned her gratitude for ever. Duclos, who tyrannised over her, hated Grimm, as may be imagined. Francueil, who still visited at La Chevrette, may have been in his heart not too much his friend. "But," says Madame easily, "we led a very charming life." M. de Francueil came as often as M. Grimm. "Ils se partageaient même de fort bon accord les soins qu'ils voulaient bien se donner pour l'instruction de mes enfants." There is no sentence in history, perhaps, which reveals so total a depravity of all moral sense as this one. It was Grimm, but not Louise, who did at last object to the situation, and, having forced her to quarrel with Duclos, suggested that Francueil should no longer be a guest at her house.

With her connection with Grimm (it lasted till her death) began the least unworthy part of her life. If he loved her, he loved his career and ambition better. But he ruled her. And on her side she had that wholesome fear of him which often keeps a fickle nature constant.

It was in 1756 that Madame d'Épinay offered

Rousseau the famous "Hermitage," the little house situated near La Chevrette, on the borders of the forest of Montmorency and belonging to M. d'Épinay. Rousseau responded to the offer after his manner: "Do you want to make me a valet, a dependant, with your gift?" said he—and took it.

Madame had now the satisfaction of seeing every day the greatest scoundrel and genius of the time. Here was the man at once mean and great, lower than the beasts in his instincts, and with aspirations reaching to the gods. Here he was, very vile, but not wholly vile; mixed in the basest intrigues, vain, mad, morbid, lying, treacherous, and yet with ideals not all ignoble, and a rugged earnestness not to be denied.

Madame's pleasure at being so nearly in touch with a celebrity could never have been quite unalloyed. The celebrity was from the first consistently rude and ungrateful, always taking offence where no offence was meant, piqued, childish, ridiculous, and obstinately seeing the world *en noir*. To La Chevrette came constantly Desmahis, Saint-Lambert, Gauffecourt, M. Jully. Louise, gaily playful, called them *mes ours*, and Grimm her "Tyran Le Blanc." "Tyran Le Blanc" was called away presently by his duties; and Louise, on some ill-fated day, introduced that charming sister-in-law of hers, Madame d'Houdetot, at the Hermitage.

Hitherto the relationship between the Hermit and Madame d'Epinay had been a kind of coquettish

friendship. If Rousseau was a little bit in love with Madame (and he always fell in love—save the mark! —with any woman with whom he was brought much in contact), Louise, for all her "Tyran Le Blanc," was not the woman to object to the admiration. It seems pretty certain that she felt a little betrayed when Jean-Jacques found in the sister-in-law the Julie of his *Nouvelle Héloïse* in the flesh, and worshipped at the shrine of a woman who was neither modish nor beautiful, and was already provided (though, to be sure, that did not count much in these times) with both husband and lover. Louise was thrown back upon herself. There was a coldness. Then she sent Rousseau some flannel for a waistcoat—to restore warmth, one may suppose. There was a deeper coldness. Then an angry flame about a letter. If there is anything duller than details of old intrigues, it is the details of old quarrels. It may be safely assumed that Rousseau was in the wrong (he had a talent for being in that position), and that Louise was inconsequent and imprudent as usual. One may well pity her. Her tyrant had joined the army at the bidding of the Duke of Orleans. She wrote to him that when he was with her he inspired her with that feeling of security which a child has resting on its mother's breast. There were a thousand dangers and difficulties about her loneliness. Her father-in-law, who cared for her, was dead. She had certainly no wisdom or judgment of her own to rely on. She impetuously confided in everybody, as she had always done, and her

confidences were very naturally betrayed. She was supposed to have informed the Marquis de Saint-Lambert of Rousseau's passion for his mistress. Perhaps she did; she denied the insinuation so warmly. Everybody seems to have got mixed up in the quarrel, and to have acted after their own natures, which were bad. Its first vehemence died out a little. But Rousseau, who still kept her gift—the Hermitage—defamed the giver with a matchless foulness in his "Confessions." From that effect of her folly, even Grimm (who from his letters would seem to have been the only person who brought any reason and common-sense into the dispute) could not save her. All the time Madame had been writing him plaintive little lying letters (giving her own convenient, plausible views of the situation and her conduct), which deceived herself, but not her lover or the world.

In 1757 she went to Geneva, partly on account of money troubles, and partly to consult the famous Dr. Tronchin. She left Grimm behind her, at war with Rousseau, and revising the first volumes of the famous Encyclopædia with Diderot. With her went her son and Linant, his tutor. (Louise was always a good mother according to her lights, and has been aptly described as one of those women "who write moral treatises on education in the brief leisure left them by their lovers.") She established herself then at Geneva under Tronchin, and lived there a life very modest and simple. She had her mornings to herself, dined *en*

famille, and after dinner received till seven or eight. She walked a good deal in the public gardens. She had always been fond of walking, and Tronchin, who was greatly in advance of his age in his views upon health, recommended the exercise to his lazy and ladylike patients. The little society of Geneva was very pleasant and honest, Madame found. One played cards, did needlework, had a little music, took tea after the English fashion, and visited one's friends in the afternoons. Wasn't this better than La Chevrette and Mademoiselle d'Ette (Madame had completely broken with the d'Ette by now), and the uneasy years of intrigue and passion that had made up her youth?

When Grimm came to Geneva for an eight months' stay, during which he and Louise worked together at the *Correspondance Littéraire,* she was perhaps as happy as she had ever been in her life. She presently made the acquaintance of Voltaire, who called her his Beautiful Philosopher, and played with her (all men regarded Louise as a clever little toy, it seems) when she became a constant visitor at Les Délices, while she on her side spoke of that "withered Pontiff of Encyclopædism" as more amiable, more gay, and more extravagant than at fifteen.

When she returned to Paris, after an absence of two years, Rousseau had left the Hermitage. Grimm had been nominated envoy at Frankfort, and she found a resource from boredom and solitude in the friendship of Diderot and the Salon of Baron Holbach, and that

Correspondance Littéraire, which is Grimm's true title to glory, and which had as its aim to render foreign princes an account of the art, science, literature, wit, and mental progress of Paris.

Madame d'Épinay was now past youth. Her mother was dead. Her daughter, Pauline, was married. M. d'Épinay, of whom Diderot said that he ran through two millions of money without saying a kind word or doing a good action to anybody, was completely bankrupt. Madame took a very small house, established her Salon, and reconquered that world which, through bad health, damaged reputation, and long absence, she had lost. She was now perhaps, both morally and mentally, at her best. The quick temptations of youth had left her. And this was the woman, alas! who was only good when there was no incitement to be bad. It must be said of her that she had shown not a little pluck and spirit in the face of poverty and difficulties. Her fickleness had Grimm's strength to support it. Her sympathy with literature made an honest interest for her. If she was still something of the gay little liar, bright, volatile, intriguing, who began the world as Louise d'Esclavelles, that is because life, though it develops character, seldom alters it.

The Salon of Madame d'Épinay had that characteristic common to nearly all the Salons—its presiding genius was neither young, beautiful, wealthy, nor even well educated.

A woman, in fact, always influences not by how

much she knows, but by how much she feels. In the gatherings of this little Louise, at any rate, the gravest subjects were discussed and threshed out. After the *ivresse* and folly of the Regency, gravity had suddenly become the mode. The most frivolous women were profoundly absorbed in political economy and philanthropy. Philosophic ideas were daily gaining ground. One day one was evolving a new religion —some fine religion of Humanity, which worked out beautifully in talk or on paper, and in practice led to Candeille, Goddess of Reason. To this Salon came almost the whole diplomatic corps. Baron Gleichen, Lord Stormont (the Ambassador of Great Britain), Caraccioli, Diderot, Galiani, and the ill-fated Marquis de Mora, were here almost every night. Louise listened equally charmingly to them all. Was she a humbug? Hardly. She had only that most dangerous gift—the power of seeing things exactly as the last speaker sees them. When this man was talking philosophy to her she was an impassioned philosopher. With a theologian she had a *culte* for religions. To be sympathetic it is not necessary to *know* much of a man's work and aims, but essential to catch his enthusiasm for them, to respond to fervour with fervour, and to realise that what one's dearest hope is to oneself this man's career or philosophy or ambition is to him.

If even Madame d'Épinay had this gift in a less degree than some of her rival Salonières, that she had it in a very marked degree is not to be doubted.

In the early days of 1775 appeared in print her *Conversations d'Émilie*, which were, in fact, literal reproductions of conversations she had had with a certain dear little granddaughter, her daughter's child. The book, though it is really a book of education, is only another proof that nature and naturalness are always delightful. Little Émilie's replies have the innocent naïveté of childhood, and all the freshness of truth. Madame d'Épinay's talent as a writer is indeed like the literary talent of nearly all women, and lies in this work, as in her Memoirs, in reproduction and observation, and not in invention. *Émilie* was smiled on by Voltaire in his old age at Ferney, and by that cleverest of women, the Empress Catharine of Russia. Diderot, Grimm, Gleichen, and Galiani praised its gaiety and originality, and in 1778 it went, to every one's satisfaction, into a new edition.

Before this time Madame d'Épinay's health, never robust, had begun to cause her friends great anxiety. She would seem, like many delicate people, to have always borne her physical sufferings very pluckily. The little Émilie was with her a great deal. Grimm, never impassioned, was yet always faithful. He had an extraordinary attachment for the grandchild, which perhaps brought him the more often to see Louise. In 1777 she heard of Francueil's marriage to a daughter of Marshal Saxe. (Of this marriage was born a son, Maurice Dupin, who became the father of Madame George Sand.) In 1778 Louise saw

in Paris Voltaire, now near his death. Rousseau (whose "Confessions" had had so fatal an effect upon her good name) did not long survive him. It was Madame's part, though she herself was not an old woman, to watch the going of almost all the acquaintances of her youth. Her situation was very lonely. Her husband's death did not make it any lonelier perhaps. Her son was wild—after such an upbringing and amid such examples how should he not have been? Her daughter had her own life to lead. What must have been the feelings of the woman with death in the near future and that wasted existence to look back at in the past?

Was it repentance, agony, remorse, terror, that she suffered in those lonely hours of sickness and solitude? It would not seem to have been so. After all "one can be but what one is."

The dying woman faced the Great Mystery with at least something of that *légèreté* with which the coquette of La Chevrette had faced life. A sinner? Well, perhaps. But not half such a great sinner as most of one's acquaintance! If one lives self-deceived, one may well die so.

Madame was removed presently to a little house at Chaillot, and there from her sick-bed composed and sent to Grimm, with a lock of her hair, the verses which begin:—

> "Les voilà, ces cheveux que le temps a blanchis :
> D'une longue union ils sont pour nous le gage."

She had friends and relatives about her to the end. Her last correspondence was with that chief of all the Encyclopædists, d'Alembert. And then her "Conversations" attained the supreme honour of being crowned by the Académie Française. So that she died smiling as she had lived.

. . . . . .

Her Memoirs, which are chiefly known to English people through Sydney Smith's brilliant critique, owe their great claim to fame in the vivid pictures they give of Rousseau, Duclos, Voltaire, and many minor celebrities. They are written in a style very bright, easy, and vivacious. They record not a few inimitable conversations (as in the two scenes at Mademoiselle Quinault's), and here and there a memorable axiom. They present strikingly the life and manners of the day. Further than this they are worth little.

These are the Memoirs of false names and suppressions. Madame invents a tutor to tell the story of the charming Émilie, and only tells the truth about her because she does not perceive how damning that truth is. When, indeed, the conduct of this heroine has been too obviously shameless even for her to think it virtuous, she appeals very prettily from the reader's judgment and moral sense to that much more gullible thing, his feelings. The whole book is full of very brightly written details of very dull intrigues; of sordid details of bankruptcy and creditors; of minute details of old quarrels; of loathsome details of sick-

ness and sin. If one wants to keep intact a faith in noble aims, in self-devotion, and in that spirit which has made some put honour first and pleasure a great way after, one will not read Madame d'Épinay. But if one is a pessimist about human nature, and wants his pessimism confirmed, he can hardly do better than study this lively account of the littleness and meanness of great men and of a great age; while the historian will certainly find a niche in the temple of fame for the woman who depicts so vividly, because so unconsciously, the crying need in her class and time of that cleansing by fire, the French Revolution.

MADAME NECKER

Character, like history, repeats itself. There is, indeed, in every man, seen aright, an originality which makes the dullest human being supremely interesting: and in each life a drama never before played on any stage. But the type recurs. In Madame Necker, with her passionate heart, her cleverness without wisdom, her instincts in place of judgment, her talent for affection, and for making herself and others wretched by that affection, every one will recognise some acquaintance of his own. Perhaps he will be thus the more able to feel for her that sympathy without which there can be no real understanding.

Suzanne Curchod was the very bright little daughter of a certain Louis, Evangelical minister at Crassier, in Vaud. Madame Curchod was French, very pretty, very firm, very religious. There was by no means too much money in the little household. But when the baby girl was born in 1737, she completed a very real, pious, and modest happiness.

Her father was so proud and fond of her that he undertook her tuition himself. It was such a clever little creature from the first, that he felt justified in giving it a boy's education. Suzanne looked up into

MADAME NECKER.

his face and learned Latin and geometry, presently physics and science, and possibly Greek. From what one knows of the famous Madame Necker, one must suppose that the little girl's intellect was exclusively feminine, which is to say that she had a very fine intuition, rather than solid reasoning powers, the impulsive cleverness that is brilliant but hardly sound, and the tendency to mistake feeling for logic which marked Mother Eve, and marks her daughters for ever.

But Suzanne had not only an aptitude for head work. She could play on the violin and the harpsichord. She knew something about an unlikely instrument called the tympanum. She painted delightfully. When one adds that she was charmingly vivacious, with very blue eyes, very fair hair, the most exquisite girlish complexion, and all the gaiety, modesty, and freshness of early youth, it does not seem at all wonderful that her father always had a large and ever-ready supply of young ministers from Geneva or Lausanne to help him with his services on Sundays. When the day was over, and the time came for the divine to ride home on M. Curchod's old horse, it appears that he was not the only person who felt regret at the parting. It is hardly a stretch of the imagination to picture Suzanne going out to the gate, half gay, half sad, and wholly charming, on the pretence of giving a little sugar to the old horse, or instructions to the man of God on the route he should take.

She confessed very naïvely that she liked best that

praise—on her little efforts at literary composition—which came from the opposite sex. Compliments to one's beauty are not less acceptable than compliments to one's wit. Suzanne coquetted very prettily with a number of persons, and permitted a rather ponderous local genius, a certain Dariet Defoncene, to call her his "modern Sappho," and address her in very second-rate and highly inflammatory verses, signed "Melchizedek."

When she came to Lausanne presently with her parents, she was the life and soul of all the dull Protestant parties in the place. She enjoyed herself so much that she *must* have given enjoyment to others. She was made president, presently, of a literary society, called the Académie des Eaux, to which the local young persons of talent belonged, and called themselves after the heroes and heroines of the plays and novels of the day. They wrote essays and verses, and criticised each other's compositions. They answered questions such as "Is love sweeter by reason of its mystery?" "Can the same kind of friendship exist between a man and a woman, as between two men or two women?" The Académie des Eaux was to them what papers and magazines are to the English youth of to-day. They set themselves to answer the same unanswerable or self-evident conundrums with the greatest seriousness and enjoyment. Not a little zest was lent to the entertainment at Lausanne by the fact that the members of the Académie were not exclusively of one sex, and sometimes found the solution of the problems by ex-

perience. Most of the youth were, at any rate, more or less in love with Thémire, or Suzanne, its head. And Thémire, who, with her impetuous, warm heart, couldn't help enjoying admiration, dispensed her favours among them with a beautiful impartiality.

It was at the Académie des Eaux, most likely, that she first met the great Gibbon. The great Gibbon was nobody in particular, however, at present. He was only a fat English youth, who had turned Papist, and been sent to the house of the Calvinist minister of Lausanne to be re-converted. He was now in character, as he was hereafter, a very cold and self-complacent pedant, extraordinarily vain and egotistical, with a sincere love of truth, and a memory and capacity for learning unequalled even in the eighteenth century. If it was not his genius, which a brilliant girl like Suzanne might easily have discovered before a dull world suspected it, it is hard to say what attraction she could have found in him. He talked well, indeed. One may picture the local talent of the Académie listening to him—too polite to laugh at his awkward English fatness and affected manner—but only very dimly, or not at all, guessing the marvellous power, irony, accuracy, which that unprepossessing exterior covered. And listening, too, with her lovely expressive face, and her ardent and sympathetic heart, President Thémire Suzanne Curchod.

When was it that Gibbon permitted himself to be boundlessly and extravagantly adored by her? That was always their attitude to each other. The "Decline

and Fall" could never have been sincerely in love with anybody but himself.

But for Suzanne, the ministers, and that absurd Dariet Defoncene, and the adoration of all the Académie were so much less than nothing now. They were but the false lights before the dawn. This was morning, noon, sunshine. One lived, one worshipped. She flung her whole heart and soul into this passion. She had no prudence. She spoke her love, not ashamed. She was the devotee before a saint, and behold, the saint was but a stone effigy after all, whom the kisses of a thousand years would not warm into life.

It is from the spirit of their letters one gathers the real state of things. Gibbon's father disapproved of his son's *penchant.* And the lover—save the mark!—who had condescended to find Suzanne learned as well as lovely, and to hope that he had made "some impression upon a virtuous heart," yielded to the paternal authority as a good son should, and wrote to the girl, eating that heart out with shame and misery, that his cure was helped by hearing of her "tranquillity and cheerfulness."

Tranquillity! this woman never knew such a feeling all her life. She was not the stuff of which tranquil people are made. She certainly did not know it when in 1758 Gibbon went back to England, and left her for four years without a sign of his existence, beyond sending her, with a frigid dedicatory epistle, his *Essai sur l'Étude de la Littérature.* He had not been man

enough to break off their engagement decidedly and for all. He left her to hope against hope that he would come back to her. Her pride and her self-contempt tortured her every hour. In four years one may well feel all "the pangs of despiséd love."

In 1762 he at last wrote to break with her definitely. In 1763 he came back to Lausanne. His Memoirs relative to this time contain not a single allusion to her. A few days after his arrival she begged him to tell her plainly that he no longer cared for her. When her impetuous letter had been given back to her, she wrote on it in the depth of her humiliation: "A reflecting soul is punishment enough. Every thought draws blood." Finally she met him at Voltaire's, at Ferney. He was so cruel ("only to be kind," perhaps) that the next day she wrote him her last letter. She did not spare him. He did not deserve that he should be spared—though when an impulsive woman flings herself upon a cold man's heart, he is to be a little pitied as well as she. She told him the truth. She told it him at the greatest length, and with every line burning with indignation and wretchedness, and then thanked God that He had delivered her from "the greatest of misfortunes," a marriage with Gibbon, and ended by saying that he might one day regret the loss of the "too honest and too loving heart" he had despised.

It would seem that this broken love-story affected Suzanne's whole character. When it began, she was

a girl. It left her a woman. It found her a very lively, pretty, vivacious coquette. It left her passionately sensitive, not a little morbid and despondent, too scrupulous in conscience, nervous, excitable, suspicious. For to be betrayed is not only the bitterest experience of human life; it is also the most far-reaching in its effects. For it too often destroys trust not only in the deceiver, but in all men. And to be without faith in human nature generally means to be also without faith in God.

In the January of 1760 Suzanne's father died suddenly, leaving his widow and daughter wretchedly poor. Suzanne fought poverty with not a little spirit, and began to give lessons. She was fighting, too, all the time that source of wretchedness in her own heart, her love for Gibbon. No one who has himself been through some such period of youthful bitterness will judge her harshly, because her trouble made her petulant, exacting, and difficult at home. That noblest fruit of sorrow—an infinite tenderness for the sorrows and failings of other people—is fruit seldom borne by a young tree. Suzanne could not yet believe that happiness is not a necessity of life, and was at this time, or said afterwards that she was, wicked and capricious towards her mother. When two years later that mother died, the daughter lamented her with a passion of grief not a little hysterical.

She was now quite alone in the world. She was so young! She had no money. She was so proud!

And she found one of the best friends of her whole life in a certain Pastor Moultou. Another pastor, Cayla, Moultou's father-in-law, offered her a home in his house. Then, as now, the need of it brought out kindness, and a world that has been called cruel vindicated itself by generous deeds.

Suzanne did not lack lovers, one may be quite sure. She was so lonely and despairing, that she very nearly accepted an offer of marriage from a certain barrister—simply for a home and peace.

It was at Moultou's house that she met a gay little widow, Madame de Vermenoux, who was under the famous Dr. Tronchin, and trying to console herself for ill-health with the admiring society of a number of male friends. She took an impetuous fancy to this very pretty Mademoiselle Curchod. Suzanne must come back and live with her in Paris! Suzanne's pride was up in arms in a minute. It was Moultou who reasoned with her and made her accept so advantageous an offer. The woman who was hereafter to rule the most brilliant society in the capital entered it first as an obscure dependant, who had not enough money even to dress herself as fashionable Paris required, and who represented herself as rich to the good-natured little widow for fear Madame should humiliate her by presents.

To Madame de Vermenoux's, as, it is said, one of the charming widow's admirers, came one day a certain M. Necker, Swiss, *bourgeois*, banker, very rich, very

clever, rather ugly, and peculiarly absent-minded. Perhaps he was so absent-minded that it slipped his memory that his hostess was an aristocrat, and that though she might permit herself to flirt with a financier, was not at all likely to marry him. Perhaps he was thinking exclusively of M. Necker. ("Malebranche saw all things in God," said Mirabeau, "and M. Necker sees all things in Necker.") When was it that the financial eye first rested with interest on Madame's guest? Mademoiselle was still young, and if sorrow had robbed her of some of the soft and brilliant bloom which characterised the happy President Thémire, it had lent her face feeling, depth, expression. Her own clever mind could but be attracted by the sagacity and intelligence of the banker's. His self-conceit—well, that was a quality to which her friendship with Gibbon should have accustomed her. That old rebuff of fortune made her cautious here. Once hurt as she had been, one does not lightly put oneself in the way of being wounded again. Did he care for her? He had not said so. He went away to Geneva, leaving her in suspense; came back to Paris, and, with his offer of marriage, the sunshine flooded her dull world once more.

The pair kept their engagement secret from Madame de Vermenoux. One fine morning they slipped out quietly and were married. There seems not a little meanness in their conduct, after the kindnesses Suzanne had received from Madame. But there were,

doubtless reasons (though possibly not good reasons) for such reserve.

They went to live in the Rue St. Michel le Comte, in the house belonging to the firm of Thelusson and Necker. They enjoyed, one may well hope, that honeymoon happiness of which description is a desecration. And presently Suzanne was writing very gaily to a friend, with M. Necker looking over her shoulder, "Picture to yourself the worst-witted man in the world, so completely persuaded of his own superiority that he does not see mine," &c., &c., &c. If one has never known the laughing tenderness of such a spring-time in one's own experience, everybody at least must have looked at it through other men's eyes.

The change which Suzanne's marriage made in her worldly prospects was very great. Instead of Madame de Vermenoux's dependant, she was the mistress of a fine house and many servants. Her husband was very rich, and not a little influential. When he was made Minister for the Republic of Geneva, the position gave him access to the Court and to the society of such men as Maurepas. At home his wife was very loving and brilliant, with curious fits of depression as a kind of reaction after a great deal of liveliness, very conscientious and impetuously religious. One cannot think that she could ever have been an easy wife to manage. Her very devotion to her husband, ecstatic, absorbed, and without sense of the ridiculous, must have been difficult for a practical man to deal with. Yet not

the less this marriage is one of the very few marriages in history which seems even to the onlooker well assorted. M. Necker was a great financier rather than a great man. But besides an extraordinary sagacity, he had a sound common-sense which made a fine, firm background to Suzanne's emotions. She could not but respect one in whose life duty and the good of others were strong sentiments, even if there was some little truth in the *mot* of Madame de Marchais: "M. Necker loves virtue as a man loves his wife, and glory as he loves his mistress."

On April 22, 1766, Corinne-Delphine-Anne-Germaine Necker made her entrance into the world. Madame de Vermenoux, forgiving much, was her godmother. Her father was infinitely proud of her. Suzanne resolved, as soon as ever the little girl was old enough to learn anything, she would teach her herself.

Before that time came, Madame Necker found herself the head of one of the most famous Salons in Paris.

Marmontel says that she started it as a relaxation for her husband. This is very possible. It was not easy to start. Unlike the other Salons, it was at least partly coaxed into existence by the husband himself. "The fruit of the tree of knowledge" was then, as now, very often a particularly "aërial and unsatisfactory diet." It was becoming the fashion or the philosophers and the men of letters to seek pecuniary aid from financiers. And M. Necker was of them all the most generous.

As for his wife, "Who is this upstart?" said the other women at first. "A little Swiss Protestant from Crassier? Somebody's poor companion, quite unnecessarily good-looking? The wife of a *bourgeois?* Bah!"

It is not a little curious that the Salonière who, in contradistinction to almost all her rivals, was at once young, beautiful, rich, and learned, should not only be the one who of them all found it the most difficult to begin her Salon, but who, when it was at the height of its fame, was not always kindly criticised even by its *habitués.*

Diderot says he first came because she bothered him to do so. The Abbé Galiani was a constant attendant, chiefly because he could not hold his own in argument against the open atheism of such a Salon as Baron Holbach's, for instance, and complained a good deal—without meaning a compliment to her—of Madame Necker's "cold demeanour of decency." Grimm's cool head and heart (his heart, says somebody, was always in the right place—the market-place) could not believe in the sincerity of her warm religious convictions. Another friend murmured that she was without taste in dress, artificial in mind and face, and pedantic in language. It was said again that she never directed the conversation without visible effort, and suggested that her manner was too effusive, that that "fiery soul" expressed its convictions or prejudices too warmly both in looks and words, and that some of the passionate sensitiveness and nervousness which afflicted

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herself, afflicted her friends. It may be true as well that she was too keenly absorbed in the drama of her own life, and the far greater drama of her husband's, to be very interested in other people. As for her learning—it is only a supremely tactful and sympathetic woman who can hinder learnedness from being a social hindrance to her. Madame Necker was too impetuous for tact, as she was too concentrated for sympathy.

But her Salon, not the less, attained a wide fame. The *littérateurs* and philosophers flocked to it on Fridays, in her new house the Hôtel le Blanc, Rue Cléry, and presently in the famous Rue Bergère. On Tuesdays her intimates dined with her at four o'clock. In summer she received, first at her house in the Bois de Boulogne, and then at the Château de St. Ouen, between Paris and St. Denis. "I go once a week to supper at St. Ouen," said Madame du Deffand. She spoke of her host as quite frank and natural, but a little bit ponderous in conversation, and very absent-minded.

Suzanne had an impulsive welcome for all her guests; knew how to flatter their self-love a little, it is said, though this was less by design than because *her* impetuosity led her to say the right thing instead of the wrong. Some of her friends asked for her help and influence to elect them to the Academy. Sometimes in the evening she had Mademoiselle Clairon, the famous actress, to amuse them. She relied much

less than the other Salonières on her own powers of entertaining. On a footstool at her mother's feet sat the little Germaine, very bright and very precocious. When the Maison Necker received at St. Ouen, its guests walked about under the trees on the terrace, and Monsieur sent them back presently to Paris in his own carriages. There was a famous dinner, described by Grimm, at which seventeen men of letters proposed to erect a statue to Voltaire by subscription, and the daughter of the good Calvinist Curchod objected, because Pigalle, the sculptor, *would* have the figure represented almost without any clothes at all.

What has been called the "marsh-miasma of Salons" can hardly be said to have risen from this one. Its head, at least, was a passionately religious woman, a faithful wife, and a severely conscientious mother. If she permitted in her rooms a society by no means immaculate, that proves rather the low moral tone of her age than any laxity in her own virtue. It was the custom. Let any one try to alter the public opinion of his own time, and he will pardon Madame Necker that she could not change the public opinion of hers.

Buffon, the naturalist, supremely pompous and self-complacent, and with, alas! most of the typical vices of the French philosopher of the day, was one of her faithful adherents. She admired the heavy pedantry of his style, and modelled her own upon it. And in

Thomas's bombastical periods — Thomas being her devoted worshipper for twenty years—she saw only solemnity and magnificence. Literary taste was hardly Madame's forte. Here, as elsewhere, the strong biases of a warm heart led her astray. Perhaps it was such a bias that made her seek and keep Diderot, whom "it was impossible to respect or to help loving," and who, though "he talked as never man talked," was not the less "utterly unclean, scandalous, shameless." Kindly old Madame Geoffrin scolded Suzanne's guests—for their good. The Duchess de Lauzan was one of her attached friends. It was this duchess who, married at sixteen, and abandoned by her Duc the next day, was to be hereafter of that noble army of martyrs who expiated others' sins under the guillotine, and who mounted the scaffold with "that air of sweetness and virgin modesty" which once captivated Rousseau. Besides these were Suard, the censor of the *Académie*, Morellet, Raynal, Arnauld, Saint-Lambert, Marmontel, and many others. It was Suzanne's ambition which loved her Salon, and her heart which loved to get back to the husband she worshipped, and the child who was to divide her from him.

Her relationship to Germaine belongs to Germaine's history rather than to her own. It suffices to say here that, as a mother, Madame Necker was governed by that passionate and morbid desire to do right which ruled her whole life, and that she was always so sternly seeking the child's real good that she had no time

for the little tendernesses which gain a child's heart. When was it she felt first for the gay and engaging little creature, who appealed to a side of M. Necker's nature which the intense wife could never touch, a sudden and miserable jealousy? Suzanne was at no time a petty woman. But to see this charming, vain, clever, naughty little daughter taking up all the time and attention that once were only hers! That was too much. The father spoilt the child and laughed with her. They had a hundred little understandings from which Madame felt herself shut out. She watched them—when was he ever so light-hearted with her?—fond, stern, and wretched. She thought she suffered only because Monsieur interfered with her scheme of education. She was always communing on the subject with her own sore heart. She wrote pages and pages of prayers, as ecstatic as a fasting nun's. Her troubles were not lessened when Germaine grew up into a most vivacious and accomplished girl. The daughter must be married—for her good. Suzanne wanted her to be the wife of Pitt. And Pitt said, "I am married to my country." So in 1786, and in default of better, Germaine was given to the Baron de Staël-Holstein, lived near her parents, and became at length the presiding genius of their Salon in the Rue Bergère.

Was this time, which should have been the happiest, one of the most wretched of Madame Necker's life? No one can lightly say that troubles which come

chiefly from one's own morbid temperament deserve no compassion. There is no cure for them but some cruel blow from fate. For it is only in the presence of a real misfortune one knows no imaginary ones.

Madame sat by while the daughter, unconsciously perhaps, and certainly with no evil intentions, took her adherents from her. They talked politics. Germaine could (and did) talk about anything. Madame's bent was literary and not political. She was suffering much in health at this time, and her old vivacity—was this the Thémire of Crassier and Lausanne?—failed her. Her friends, Thomas, Buffon, Diderot, were dying or dead. There was impassioned talk of the times that were coming — nay, were come — upon France. Madame did not need such fearful anticipations to fill her cup of misfortune. Her own self-torment had filled it to the brim. It was M. Necker who said of his wife that to make her entirely delightful in society she only needed one thing—to have something to forgive herself. She seemed outwardly stern, righteous, and cold. But what a morbid self-reproach in those prayers—what a mistrust of everything, of the husband who loved her so much, of the daughter she loved not a little! When the enormous task of introducing his great plans for financial and administrative reform made Monsieur worried and preoccupied, Madame thought he was cold to her because her beauty was fading and her youth gone. When he disapproved of her talent for writing (which indeed she turned

too often to morbid uses), she offered to destroy her Essay on Fénélon if he would give up his direction of the India Company. The inequality of the bargain did not occur to her. She was passionately devoted to him. But she did not rise to that better devotion which would have helped him to do his duty, even if the path to it had to be cut through her own heart.

Perhaps she was easier in mind when they went to Coppet—the estate near Geneva, which they bought in 1784. Here, in the presence of the great quiet mountains, with their peaceful slopes of field and forest, her jealous mind may well have been more at rest. Her unhappiness was always partially physical. If one could but have stayed here! If one could but have got away for ever from the political whirlpool which engulfed one's husband, from the social life which brought one into rivalry with one's own child!

In 1781 M. Necker had resigned his official situation (which he had kept for five years) as Controller-General of the Treasury.

From 1781 to 1788 he was out of place, though hardly out of power, and spent his time in schemes for the good of his country and in defending his past acts. In 1788 he was recalled as Controller-General.

It was on July 11, 1789, when Monsieur and Madame were entertaining a party of friends at dinner, that he received his letter of banishment from

Louis XVI. He put it in his pocket and said nothing. After, he told Madame. She rose to the occasion as such a woman would. When there was so great a cause for emotion she forgot to be emotional, and only thought of her husband. They ordered the carriage as if they had been going to take a summer evening drive. They made an excuse to their guests. They told Germaine nothing, for fear in her grief she should have been indiscreet. If the mob—that wild mob of Paris, always in a frenzy of love or hatred—knew that Necker, their idol, was being taken from them, they would bring him back by force in triumph. Madame, who was in wretched health, did not even wait to change her dress. They never rested day or night until they reached Brussels. Germaine found them there three days later, worn and travel-stained, and otherwise just as they had left the dinner-table on that memorable evening. They had only reached Frankfurt when they received the king's urgent and passionate recall. The Bastille had fallen; Paris was mad for the man the monarch had disgraced. What were the feelings of these people as they were led back in glory, with the mob applauding them, drums beating, music playing, "a host of cavalry, infantry, and citizens" guarding them, children throwing flowers, women singing, and the flags of what once was the Bastille waving in the air? The father and daughter shared that "universal intoxication" of joy. Perhaps Madame's more fore-

boding soul was fearful of such a wild success—suspicious of that frenzied worship. She was with her husband in the City Hall, where the people wept at his words and he seemed to them "as a god." He was reinstated in his high functions in the Government, and, with his wife, took up his residence at Versailles.

On the morning of October 5, that great day of the Insurrection of Women, when the "ten thousand Judiths" advanced upon the palace, Madame de Staël hurried there to her parents, fearful, as she might well be, for their safety. Outside was "an infernal host," "an immense people." Within, M. Necker hastened to the king. His wife followed him to the Salon next the king's, that whatever might be her husband's fate she might share it. In this supreme crisis, when every moment one lived through made history, she would seem to have been at her best and her serenest. The next day, when Marie Antoinette returned from that immortal scene on the balcony, when Lafayette kissed her hand and the fickle people shouted "her name to the very clouds," it was to Madame Necker she turned saying, sobbing, "They force the king and myself to go to Paris with the heads of our bodyguard borne on the pikes."

Suzanne was spared that cruel scene, and drove back to the capital with her husband and daughter on a smiling autumn day through the Bois de Boulogne. What was in her heart? Could her husband even now

save France? He himself said it was too late. The tide rushed on to the Terror, and a greater than Necker could not have stemmed it. Suzanne implored him to retire and save himself before that public feeling, upon which no man could rely for an hour, turned against him, and made salvation impossible. She had always been for peace and obscurity. Who shall say that when they went to Coppet, but a little more than a year after that great recall to power, the wife's heart was all sad? They left their country, indeed, in a condition past hope. The world that began so brilliantly for her husband lay in ruins at his feet. But now the wife, who had been a part of his life, might perhaps be all of it! If Madame Necker had some such feelings, she was not the first woman who has known them, and will not be the last.

The arrival at Coppet in September 1790 was dismal enough. M. Necker wrote much. Suzanne had a gloomy room looking out over the park, and fell into that old, bad habit of brooding, brooding, brooding. Gibbon came over from Lausanne, where he was writing his "Roman Empire," to stay with them. He had stayed with them before this in Paris, and they had a comfortable friendship for him, and a very sincere admiration for his talents. Did he or Suzanne remember those old days when they first met? He wrote of her to Lord Sheffield: "Madame Necker's outward manner is better; mais le diable n'y perd rien." And *she* loved her husband with that absorbing

devotion which admits no other affection. Madame de Staël came from the red heart of the Revolution to join her parents, and Coppet was a shelter for many refugees.

Madame Necker's condition of health was now very unsatisfactory. Her conduct to her mother at that bitter time—how many long years ago!—preyed upon her mind. Perhaps Coppet itself, with its thick, dark avenues of trees and great solitary rooms, was not very good for a melancholy temperament. She tried to collect her friends in the neighbourhood round her; but could she help thinking often of an earlier visit there, when they saw her famous and prosperous? M. Necker, "abandoned by his friends, vilified by his enemies, disowned by his country," could not always have been a cheerful companion.

By 1792 Madame was really ill. The great doctors saw her. But who can minister to a mind diseased? A happy temperament is either a gift from the gods or the fruit of one's own effort. If no one could give ease and rest to the fortunate young wife of the successful banker, how should they find it for this grey-haired woman? A passionate loathing for Coppet took possession of her heart. She was moved to Robe, from where she wrote her farewell letter to her husband, which he must have read after her death. She thought her soul would still watch over his fate. Before this she had had a great desire that her body should be embalmed instead of buried. A thousand morbid fancies

took possession of her. This woman, who had always tried to be good, was haunted by such a fear of death as an evil conscience is often spared.

She was taken to Lausanne to be under Tissot. The last thing she ever wrote was her will, dated January 6, 1794. She made provision out of her very little *dot* for her maid, for some of her poor people, and some distant relatives; asked her husband to supply the further money the *dot* would not cover; and then, with that doubting heart which was her torment, reproached herself for having thus appealed to his generosity.

Her last months were passed in dreadful bodily suffering; but her husband's devotion must have killed even *her* distrust. Germaine, too, was with her mother. Oh, how small, seen from the threshold of another world, must have looked the jealousies which made this one miserable! The daughter sang to her sometimes. When she was alone the sick woman prayed fervently out loud. Often, worn by fatigue, she fell asleep on her husband's arm, and he remained in the same position for hours rather than disturb her. She turned to him once to say, "I fear death, for with you I loved life." At last, when she was too weak to speak, she stretched out her hand to him. She died May 6, 1794.

Oh, what a stormy soul was this, and under that cold exterior what a full and throbbing heart! There is hardly any other famous woman in whom the idea of duty was so overmastering and persistent as it was in

this one. Was she, indeed, as Madame du Deffand described her, "rigid, frigid, and good"? Was her virtue often forbidding and severe? She lived in an age when, if a woman's virtue was not severe, she had none. The very intensity of her feelings made her seem stern. If she had loved her husband less absorbingly, she might have been easier to live with. If she had been less passionately desirous of her daughter's real good, she might have been a more judicious mother. Some irony of fate always pursued her. If few have tried so hard to do well, many with less effort have done better. In considering Madame Necker, one must remember always that "it is not what man does that exalts him, but what a man would do."

As a philanthropist she founded a famous hospital, and, like her husband, was sincerely devoted to the good of the people.

Religion was the mainstay of her life, and remained an absorbing conviction, though there was hardly one of her friends who shared it, and scepticism was in the air she breathed.

It was Madame Necker who wrote: "I am every day astonished at the moral perversion which withers all minds and all hearts. Vices or virtues are alike indifferent, provided only conversation is animated, and ennui, our most dreaded plague, is banished."

As an authoress, she was as ecstatic as she was in her prayers and her heart.

Her *Réflexions sur le Divorce* are the most passionate

and touching argument for the sanctity of marriage. Her *Mélanges,* published by her husband after her death, are rich in axioms and epigrams.

If there was another woman of the eighteenth century whose judgment was so unperverted by its shams, she is hard to find.

At Coppet, where first Bayle, and then the greatest financier and his daughter, the most brilliant literary woman of modern times, lived, and where all nature has that supreme serenity which is peculiar to a mountainous lake country, may still be seen the tomb where rests at last the passionate heart of the woman who began the world at little Crassier, not six miles away, as the minister's daughter, Suzanne Curchod.

Walker & Cockerell, phs.

Madame de Staël.

MADAME DE STAËL

THERE is no more dazzling figure in modern European history than Madame de Staël. The daughter of Necker and the Revolution, she lived to see the new condition of society which was ushered in by the battle of Waterloo. She was the connecting link between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Brought up in an age when women influenced greatly indeed, but influenced exclusively from their own homes and Salons, she ran about Europe always talking and always writing, carrying on an immortal warfare with Bonaparte—the newest of new women, as she was certainly the cleverest and the most extraordinary.

She made for herself a life which the concisest of encyclopædists and biographers seem unable to compress into the usual half column. She plunged into politics. She was stateswoman, novelist, playwriter, actress, metaphysician, patriot, intriguer, musician, philosopher. What was she not? As a Salonière her Salon was nothing. It was only its mistress who counted. Its habitués were there, not to talk with each other, but to listen to her. In the other Salons it was the men who made history. In this, it was the woman who whispered in their ear, who suggested

this, proposed that, and made them say at the *Tribunat* to-morrow, what she thought in her rooms to-night. So that Napoleon said, "Ce n'est point un salon, c'est un club"—and exiled her.

Born in Paris, April 22, 1766, Germaine was almost from the first a cause of disagreement between the parents who loved her. Papa was so gay, and mamma so strict! The bright, ugly, black-eyed baby distracted M. Necker with her infant vivacity from the great cares of his position. He was the best of playfellows. At what absurd age does a little woman discover that one admires her, and finds her small sayings laughable, and her small ways charming? When her mother received, Germaine sat by her side on a very straight-backed little chair (Madame thought straight-backed chairs and uncomfortableness in themselves virtuous and regenerating to the soul), and listened with a very keen little mind, which no doubt took in much more than that righteous mother fancied, to the most brilliant conversation of an age gorgeous in its setting.

All the guests spoke to the little girl. Here were Grimm, Raynal, Thomas, Marmontel, who especially loved to draw her out. Be sure Germaine replied to them with a perfect confidence. It was not, indeed, a very good bringing-up for a small person naturally not a little vain.

She was still quite a child when she was writing to her mother:—

"My dear Mamma,—I want to write to you. My heart is drawn tight. I am sad, and in this large house I see now only a desert."

And again:

"Let me kiss you a thousand times, and press you to a heart that belongs only to you and papa."

Before the practical English mind condemns the letter-writer as an affected little *poseuse*, it should remember that Germaine was a French child, and that when she was no longer a child she never knew an emotion—and she knew many and passionate ones—without talking or writing about it.

Some painter should put on canvas that garden scene at St. Ouen, where she was sent as a girl to recover her health after too much brain-work, and where, with a little Mademoiselle Huber, she amused herself by declaiming tragic verses, and reciting plays and poems, dressed in white like a wood nymph. She was not at all pretty. She was never pretty. She had rather coarse features, and a certain bold brilliancy of expression, not all attractive. But then every fresh feeling re-created her face. She was at this time divinely young. And her ugliness was now, as later, so clever that it interested more than any placid beauty.

She had written tragedies before she was grown up. She had a mind that dared anything. She had already begun to idolise her father with that idolatry which only died at her death. She herself said that the *enlèvement* of Richardson's Clarissa was one of the

events of her childhood, and might well have exclaimed with the heroine of another novel, "Il me faut des émotions!" "That which amused her was that which made her weep," wrote Mademoiselle Huber. There was no other girl in the world—not even another French girl—who was at sixteen or seventeen years old such a brilliant compound of genius, vanity, inspiration, sentiment, and impulse as Germaine Necker.

The richest heiress in France was just twenty when she married the Baron de Staël-Holstein, Swedish Ambassador in Paris. He was much older than herself. He was nobody. He only lent his wife a name which she was to render immortal. They separated pretty soon without making any extraordinary fuss about the parting. A friend of de Staël's said that he was always "sincerely attached to his charming wife, although she showed entire indifference to him." That may have been so. But perhaps the Baron found with Lamartine, that "celebrity is like a fire which burns when one is close to it, and gives light when one is away from it. Happy he who is far from a woman's glory!"

With her marriage began that torrent of events which formed Madame's life.

She was still a very young wife when the long-smouldering misery of her country broke into flame. She had an absorbing passion for liberty. She had already published her "Letters on the Works and Character of Jean Jacques Rousseau," which are them-

selves a clever girl's passionate hero-worship for the man "without whom," said Napoleon, "there would have been no revolution in France." Before the meeting of the States-General—that "baptism day of democracy," "the extreme unction day of feudalism"—she watched from a window the great procession of the twelve hundred deputies with an exultant joy. It remained for another woman, much less brilliant and further-seeing, to say, "Do not rejoice; out of this day will arrive frightful disasters to France and to us."

Madame was with her father at his disgrace and at his recall to power. It was the Millennium—it was the Golden Age—it was Utopia! And to-day she was at Versailles and the great Insurrection of Women. As soon as possible after the birth of her son in the dramatic August of 1790, she joined her parents at Coppet. But, "I have all Switzerland in a magnificent horror," she wrote, and rushed back to Paris.

It was supremely characteristic of her now and always that she should find anything better than inaction. She *must* be moving, doing, to the fore. A Revolution —and I not in it? Social Paris still sociable, though its streets run with blood—and I not there to talk? There is no human face that expresses such an extraordinary degree of vitality and energy as Madame de Staël's. She arrived in her dearest capital, and started there the first, the most brilliant, and the most influential of her Salons, the Salon of the Revolution.

It is pre-eminently of French society that it can be

said that it is at its liveliest and wittiest in a time of anarchy and confusion. If one is French one *must* amuse oneself. And if, without, there is tragedy and ruin, why, within, only the more need to distract one's thoughts. In this Salon, besides, there was not only laughter. Here met the old nobility, and the men of the *tiers états*. The *habitués* were Talleyrand, Barnave, Chénier, Lafayette, Lally Tollendal, Narbonne, and Benjamin Constant. Madame did not lead the conversation gently, imperceptibly, as did the Salonières of those old Salons of that old world, gone for ever. Her personality dominated the room. Those flashing black eyes, those full, passionate lips, could never have belonged to a woman content to be merely tender and charming. She wanted to make felt her power, and the genius of which she was supremely conscious—and could but be conscious. She talked politics in a fire of enthusiasm. She wrote "the most important part of Talleyrand's Report on Public Instruction in 1791," and then was imploring Barras, the only member of the *Directoire* admitted here, to spare one or another victim of that insatiable monster, universal anarchy.

Before long she was saving her friends by her own exertions. She hid Narbonne in her house, and, with that infinite wit and resource which never deserted her, prevented the officials from searching it. If she ever was, as Sismondi said, *excessivement poltronne*, she certainly did not show it now. She had, instead, the mettle and pluck of a war-horse. On that awful day

of the Massacre of September she tried to escape to Coppet. She was stopped and taken to the Hôtel de Ville, escorted by that mob who the next day murdered the Lamballe with nameless atrocities. The carriage was three hours in getting through the streets. The people, goaded to madness by its aristocratic appearance, howled blasphemies and death. The gendarmes would not help her, except one, who was with her in the carriage, and fell under the potent charm of her cleverness, and promised to save her with his life. In the Hôtel de Ville she was brought before Robespierre. Manuel, the "procureur of the Commune," and her friend, found her there, and, after many hours of waiting, conducted her, in the safe shelter of the darkness, through midnight Paris to her home. The next morning she left for Coppet. There is no scene in either of her novels half so dramatic as the story of that September day. If she had written her own romance of the Revolution, it would have outlived many Corinnes and Delphines.

Early in 1793 she paid her first visit to England. She joined the little colony of *emigrés* at Mickleham. They were all very gay, witty, and poor. Neither poverty nor the horrible scenes they had come from (and in which they must have left many of those dear to them) prevented them from entertaining each other, and forming little Salons and picnic parties after the light-hearted manner of their nation. Their morals were by no means too strict, said English respectability. Some people gave Narbonne to Madame de Staël as a

lover. The Miss Berrys disapproved of her. Madame was to the fore in this society, as she was in all societies. She recited tragedies, and read aloud the first chapter of her "Influence of the Passions on the Happiness of Nations and Individuals." When she had found time to write it, Heaven knows. How she found time to write any of her works, much less to think of them, is certainly known to no one in this world. "Since you sleep all night, and act or talk all day," said her cousin and biographer, "when do you reflect and study?" "In my sedan chair," replied Madame, with her inimitable confidence. And she was back again at Coppet, writing her "Reflections on the Trial of the Queen," with her impassioned pen dipped in the impulsive pity of an ardent heart; weeping for the death of her mother; and then back again in Paris, ruling her Salon of the *Directoire*, and fighting tooth and nail that greatest of fighters, Napoleon Bonaparte.

The history of their quarrel is, after all, only the history of two powers who both wanted to be absolute in the same territory. It has been said that it was unworthy the manhood of Napoleon to persecute a woman. But it would certainly have been inconsistent with his matchless cleverness to have ignored the "talent and influence" of her whom he called a "restless intriguer," with "a mania for writing *about* everything and *of* nothing." There could be no higher compliment to her power and genius than that Bonaparte feared them, just as there is no better testimony to his

unique ability than that *Dix Années d'Exil* which she wrote to expose his character.

To this her second Salon—her Salon of the Consulate or the *Directoire*—came at first his brothers Lucien and Joseph. She could influence *them*.

She influenced, too, the journalists and the newspaper editors who now rubbed shoulders in her rooms with aristocrats who were still wearing the humble clothes which they had first donned as a protection in the Terror. The great ladies of the old *régime* were not at all above meeting here the men of those classes once called lower—of imploring of them, of gaining from them, by flatteries to which only love could have made them stoop, the restoration of exiled friends.

Madame herself was hardly of these great ladies. There was a coarseness about her somehow, in her strong passions, overweening energy, and vaulting ambition, which had very little of the calm and refinement, and a thousand times more life and vigour than ever ran in the blue blood of a dying aristocracy. It is a marvel that she could have held her Salon for an hour, in spite of a Napoleon. For that most "exquisite pleasure" of her life, "the pleasure of conversing in Paris," she fought with all her talents and powers.

Her adherents slunk away from her at last, afraid to stay; and Madame, undaunted, published her "Essay on Literature," won them back in spite of themselves

and of danger, talked once more as well and as much as it was only given to her to talk, brought out "Delphine" at Geneva, and in 1803 was banished by Napoleon to forty leagues from Paris.

If one could not be in the capital, there was no good in being in France at all. To be out of Paris was extinction! All the loveliness of Lake Leman only caused Madame to exclaim, "Oh for the gutter of the Rue du Bac!" She was still panting from the effects of her fight with Napoleon, and not more in a frame of mind to approach sober German philosophy than the great calm of nature, when she rushed frantically to Metz, Frankfort, Weimar, Berlin, and the acquaintance of Goethe, Schiller, and Wieland.

It was not, everything considered, very surprising that these grave thinkers found themselves unable to judge Madame wholly kindly. She was the more generous. She was always a warm admirer. She was not, it would seem, less self-confident now than usual. She argued philosophy with Geothe with the same impassioned brilliancy and ignorance of the subject as, later on, said Byron, "she preached English politics to the first of our English Whig politicians the day after her arrival in England."

She chatted vivaciously on subjects to the study of which her listeners had given all their lives, their deepest earnestness, and their profoundest thought. "To philosophise in society," said one of them, writing of her with not a little bitterness, "means to talk with

vivacity about insoluble problems." These heavy people were in the dumps and must be roused! Madame plunged headlong into discussions where men and angels fear to tread. She was much too impulsive to be reverent. She always wanted to be first, to attract notice, "to excite passion, no matter what." She did not wait to hear her adversary's reply. She jumped at the cleverest conclusions. Her whole genius was inspiration. "The altogether unprecedented glibness of her tongue," of which the grave Teutons complained, did not leave her a single moment for reflection or for self-distrust. When Robinson said to her later, "Madame, you did not understand Goethe, and you will never understand him," she replied, "Monsieur, I understand everything that is worth understanding; that which I don't understand is nothing." This was the key to all her brilliant mind, to her whole mental attitude towards the deepest intellects of her century.

There is no wonder that such a very naïve vanity should have been ill content with the "moderate German plaudits" given to her reading and reciting in public. It is not a little to the credit of her magnanimity that, though these stupid people did not worship her half so enthusiastically as they ought, she was even now taking notes for her *De l'Allemagne*, that book which has been well called "the revelation of the genius of Germany to the French people."

In 1804 the illness and death of her father recalled her to Coppet. She mourned him with a very loud

and a very sincere grief; but, whether he was alive or dead, his daughter must be moving, doing, a power in the world. She ran through Italy in an ecstasy. She wrote "Corinne" in another. She finished it at a friend's house very near Paris—to which she was creeping back, in spite of Napoleon. After its publication, and the roar of delight with which it was received, he banished her anew. It is supremely characteristic of the woman that, although she declared he had no heart, she was everlastingly appealing to it; that, though she herself said, "Demosthenes and Cicero combined could not lead him to the least sacrifice of his personal interest," she never ceased to try upon him the effect of her own eloquence and cleverness.

She went back to Coppet. She held there a kind of Salon. She wrote plays and acted in them. Among her guests were the exquisite Juliette Récamier (for whose loveliness Madame de Staël said she would give all her own genius), Bonsetten, Werner, Prince Augustus of Prussia, and the inevitable Benjamin Constant. But even the society of her friends—and of such friends—could not make Coppet endurable for long. She went to Germany a second time, taking Constant with her. She had that famous interview with Goethe's mother when she appeared dressed as "Corinne" in "an orange and blue turban, a robe of the same, an orange tunic, with a very short waist . . . and the usual laurel twig in her hand." She must have been now about forty years old, stout, snuff-taking,

and it must be presumed, without any very keen sense of the ridiculous. She met Fichte, and asked him to give her an account, "in fifteen minutes or so," of that famous system which it had taken him all his life and genius to evolve. The disgust of the poor man may be imagined. He had not spoken for ten minutes when she interrupted him—"It is enough; I comprehend, I comprehend perfectly"—and told him a little anecdote from "Munchausen's Travels" to illustrate his theory of "I" and "me"! It is impossible to conceive of another mind at once so clever and so inadequate. Madame's intellect was like her life: it puts one out of breath to follow it.

She was at Coppet again now, writing *De l'Allemagne*, acting plays, entertaining friends, and having her portrait painted as "Corinne," seated on a rock with a lyre in her hand, by Madame Vigée le Brun. The sitter declaimed tragic passages from Corneille and Racine, to give her face the proper expression. She was the best of actresses—of the kind that are born, not made. She published her *De l'Allemagne*, that "most masculine production of the faculties of woman," and was exiled for it. These banishments gave her so much excitement, and so much fame, that to such a nature as hers they could not have been an unmixed evil. But she was coming—nay, had come—to that time when she realised to the full how little even such a celebrity as hers was satisfying, and that "the love of all is but a small thing to the love of one."

Her husband was dead. Her relations with Benjamin Constant—whatever those relations may once have been—were certainly now not more than friendship. To that bored and brilliant cynic she had played a part at least not all ignoble; she had made him do what he could. She was a middle-aged woman—who ought to have known better, said the world, when it heard the story hereafter—when she fell in love with de Rocca. M. de Rocca was a French officer who had distinguished himself in Spain and returned home wounded, and was young, brave, chivalrous, and enthusiastic. It was Madame's fame which first attracted him to her, no doubt. And on her side? A passion which has been looked upon as almost exclusively ridiculous, places her character, not the less, in its best light. What had she to gain by marrying him? She had everything to lose. If it was a folly, it was a generous folly. There is nothing so pathetic in her history as her passionate conviction that there is no blessing in life comparable to a happy marriage. It is her cousin who says, very truly, that the inconvenience of love-matches is "précisément qu'on ne choisit pas." Madame had to suffer many of these inconveniences. She kept her secret, indeed, as much as such a woman could. It was not till after her death that every one knew of her imprudence and her happiness; but if she had had to lose the world for it, to her it would have been the world well lost.

The natural *imprévoyance* of her character could

not prevent her from having much anxiety about her husband's precarious health. "There is only one unhappiness in life," she said, "the death of what one loves."

In 1812 their child was born. By now, the rigid surveillance of Napoleon had become intolerable to Madame's energetic spirit. She escaped from Coppet on May 23, 1812, with de Rocca, and her son and daughter de Staël, to Vienna, and through Austria to Russia and Sweden. On the journey were many narrow escapes from the vigilance of the tyrant, and dramatic adventures which quite suited Madame's *penchant* for the picturesque. She stayed six months in Sweden, and, after twenty years absence from it, visited England once more.

This visit was throughout in the nature of a triumphal progress. England did not like Madame less because Bonaparte hated her. Her talents had made her not only the first woman in France, but the first woman in Europe. Hundreds of these cold Englishwomen had sobbed over her "Corinne" and "Delphine." The most exclusive of the great houses flung open their doors to her. She visited Lord and Lady Jersey, Lord and Lady Hardwicke, Lord Liverpool. She was at the Hollands' and at Rogers' literary dinners. Among her acquaintances were Canning, Lord Grey, Campbell, Bowles, Croker, Coleridge, Byron, Sir James Macintosh, Wilberforce—all the celebrities of the time. Her appearance at a party created a furore. People got on

the chairs and tables to see her. This "spiritual Amazon," this constellation to whom all the stars sang Te Deum, talked, harangued, lectured, argued everywhere. Sir James Macintosh said he had dined with her "at the houses of almost all the Cabinet ministers." "The most active, combative, and voluble of all the human beings I ever met," could put her volubility into four languages—German, English, Italian, and French. She quoted Latin. She had a "very good battle" with Lord Wellesley at Holland House on the Spanish treaty. The superior knowledge of her adversary did not daunt her in the least. Byron spoke of her society as an "avalanche." The social rules which bound other people had no hold upon her. "Mrs. Corinne always lingers so long after dinner," said the poet again, "that we wish her—in the drawing-room." When the *De l'Allemagne*, suppressed in France, was published in London, the shout of applause was deafening. Jeffrey had already called her, on the strength of "Corinne," "the greatest writer in France since Voltaire and Rousseau, and the greatest female writer of any age or country." What was her position *now?* To this woman with her "strong passion for fame" such a universal worship must have been intoxicating indeed. It proves that, with all her faults, there must have been something not a little noble in her, that, though she drank deeper of the nectar of celebrity than any woman has drunk of it before or after her, she never doubted that the best thing in life was not fame, but love.

She went home. The battle of Waterloo had given the French nation another of those changes which it needs, said Napoleon, about every three months to captivate its imagination. "With it, whoever does not advance is lost."

At her brilliant Salon of the Restoration—"more instructive than a book and more amusing than a play"—Madame received the Duke of Wellington, and could not help saying of him to a friend in a whisper, "Il faut pourtant convenir que jamais la nature n'a fait un grand homme à moins de frais." She was now fifty. But her heart had the passion and vigour of twenty. Such a woman could never grow old.

She was at Pisa with her husband, her daughter, and Schlegel. De Rocca's health was wretched. It caused Madame an intermittent and tempestuous fear, which in deeper hearts is replaced by that persistent, dull ache called anxiety. Before this her mother had, in her own words, forced Mademoiselle de Staël to make a marriage of inclination.

In June 1816 she returned to Coppet. She received Byron, whom England, having worshipped, had turned and rent. Was it not characteristic at once of Madame's boundless self-reliance and of her impulsive heart, that one of the last acts of her life should have been to attempt a reconciliation between the poet and his wife? She died, after one of the most eventful and extraordinary lives ever led by a woman.

Madame de Staël took her own generation by storm.

She inspired everywhere an enthusiasm of love or hatred. There was no medium. The time is not yet come when she can be regarded with that cold and disinterested eye which is supposed to search out truth. Her ample and vivid personality still takes one in possession. Her rush of words, her rush of feeling, her inimitable intellectual daring, her supreme conceit, and her strong passions, leave the beholder breathless, astounded, and in a frame of mind essentially unjudicial.

In her bold inconsistency and her marvellous intuitions she was supremely a woman. She was supremely unwomanly in her amazing egoism and her lust for fame. Take refuge with *her* from the battle of life without? She was herself a battle. Her love was a torrent of generous and undisciplined emotion. "If she gives herself up to her impetuous nature," said Benjamin Constant, "there is a commotion like a thunderstorm or an earthquake. . . . Did she but know how to govern herself, she could govern the world." That is her whole character summed up in little.

Her works are personal in an extraordinary degree. It is "I," "me," "my," always. The most famous of her books are full of appeal, of insistence that the world should admire, not German literature or a heroine of romance, but Anne Germaine Necker de Staël-Holstein.

"Delphine" is not immoral French fiction half so much as it is a brilliant girl's passionate cry for enjoy-

ment—the outburst of a very young heart that could not yet quite believe that "we were not sent into the world to be happy, but to be right."

"Corinne," that "chef-d'œuvre of the youth of her talent," is a picture of Italy photographed upon a most poetic heart. Corinne crowned at the Capitol, Corinne with her lyre, her beautiful sentiments, and her passionate grief, has all the ardour and genius and the lack of stern, cool common-sense of the real Corinne, Madame de Staël. The authoress always wrote, as it were, with the blood of her heart. Her cousin calls "Delphine" the book "where she has said everything." Her genius and weakness alike consisted in this. She always said everything. She put down what she felt at the moment. She never paused to reflect what effect the record of those feelings would have on other minds. She never corrected or thought over what she had written. When the hour for reflection had come she was busy composing something else. She wrote in all places and at all times. When some one read her a passage out of one of her own works, "That is very beautiful," she said, "did I indeed write that?" In the stream of publications with which she flooded the world she might well forget a few flowing phrases. If her feelings were always changing, they were not the less acute feelings for the time. "Corinne" and "Delphine" will never altogether die, because when they were written they came straight from the heart of the woman who wrote them, and abound in those

touches of nature which make all men kin. The supreme achievement of Madame's talent was doubtless *De l'Allemagne*. She studied for it for six years. It was part of her cleverness that when it was finished it appeared to have in it the research of a lifetime.

If her *Dix Années d'Exil* revealed a great deal more of her own character than it did of Napoleon's, yet not the less, with her intuitive genius, she had her infidel a thousand times upon the hip.

Her "Essay on Literature," which has been called "the greatest of all the literary productions of women," abounds in fine aphorisms, and has all the splendid dash and vigour which were pre-eminently the de Staël's.

There are few writers who have such quick-flowing grace of expression, and at once such warmth, such spirit, such passion, and such tenderness.

It is Madame de Staël who loves to quote that inimitable definition of Shelling, "architecture is frozen music." It is she herself who says, "Comprendre, c'est pardonner," and by the mouth of her dying Corinne, "Tout comprendre rend très indulgent, et sentir profondément inspire une grande bonté." It is the most famous woman of her century who finds that "for women glory is only a brilliant mourning worn for happiness," and that "everything which does not touch one's heart leaves one's life free."

On a profounder subject she says, "The mystery of existence is the connection between our sins and our

sorrows. I have never done a wrong which has not been the cause of a misfortune;" and "One must take care, if one can, that the decline of this life be the youth of the next. To forget self without ceasing to be interested in others gives the soul something of the divine."

All her thoughts have thus the softness of pearls or the sparkle of diamonds. They are exquisite gems for ornament, if they are not gold for use.

Whatever be the judgment of future generations upon the talent of Madame de Staël, the woman herself is immortal.

So long as human nature is an interesting study, so long will stand out clearly that strong figure in the flowing dress of the period, with the yellow turban on the black hair, the laurel twig in the hand, the flashing eyes and brilliant coarse face.

The other Salonières made their Salons their world. It was only this one who attempted to make the world her Salon.

MADAME RÉCAMIER

It takes perhaps a century for truth about a celebrity to be wound up from the bottom of its well. Madame Récamier has not yet been dead sixty years. Her biographies are the work of friends who wrote when they were still under the spell of her exquisite loveliness, or who were bound to her by the ties of kinship. The unfavourable criticisms on her are attributable to the jealousy of rivals. This last and least of the Salonières is, therefore, the most difficult to consider. She herself wrote nothing, or practically nothing. From the enemies and the flatterers, therefore, and from chance allusions in contemporary memoirs and letters, one has to colour her picture as near to life as one can.

Jeanne Françoise Julie Adelaide Bernard had, as she might be expected to have had, a very handsome father and mother. M. Bernard was good-looking and stupid; but Madame, his wife, was lovely, shrewd, and business-like.

The little creature born to them at Lyons on December 4, 1777, did not like any of those four fine Christian names, it appears, and elected to be called, or at any rate was called to the end of her life, Juliette. Juliette

Walker & Cockerell, ad. sc.

Madame Recamier.

found her first lover when she was about seven, and being educated by an aunt at Villefranche. The young gentleman was also about seven. The romance ended abruptly when Juliette was sent as a pupil to a certain convent of La Déserte, at Lyons. Years after she recalled, as in a "vague sweet dream," the calm convent garden, with its old-fashioned flowers, and the dim chapel, incense-scented, with its beautiful, mysterious rites, which have impressed children of a larger growth than Juliette for many centuries.

What she learned at the convent does not much transpire. She went back to Paris and to her mother, who quickly perceived that Juliette's fortune in life was to be made by her beauty. Beauty unadorned was not at all to the taste of an age when even a Vigée le Brun painted a Marie Antoinette with a structure on her head which would have made a lesser loveliness entirely ridiculous; so, no doubt, Madame Bernard was right in compelling her little girl to give up many hours to her toilette, and to realise at the earliest possible period the necessity of applying herself seriously to this gravest branch of female education.

It would not appear that Juliette was now or ever vain. She grew up with her beauty, as it were, from her infancy. She accepted it, calmly complacent. It was not a part of herself. It was her whole self. The little creature, sitting hours and hours in front of her looking-glass, was as used to her own loveliness as she was to the exceedingly injudicious compliments to which

she was always listening at the parties to which gay papa and mamma were continually taking her.

Once they took her to see the king and queen dining, according to custom, in public at Versailles. The queen noticed the little Juliette. Her beauty always attracted attention, even a queen's, naturally, and as a matter of course. She was the same age as Madame Royale. The children must be measured! Juliette was taken to the private apartments and measured with that other child, for whom Fate was preparing so widely different a destiny. Juliette was a little bit the taller. She was always, as it were, a little bit taller, a little bit lovelier, a little bit more charming, than any other woman. That was her career.

At home Madame Bernard gave her just such an education as would make her beauty yet more attractive. She was taught the harp and sang to it. She played on the piano. When she was old she recalled that music of her youth, without notes, at twilight. She danced divinely. Does not one know, later, all about that shawl dance, which gave the de Staël one of the most charming scenes in her novels?

Juliette had the gayest early girlhood imaginable. There were innumerable parties at home; and abroad —theatres, concerts, a thousand things. It was 1791–1792, and the Revolution was already at the gates. One may not be able to amuse oneself much longer! So much the more reason to be all the merrier while we can! With what an awful literalness in these times

was that saying fulfilled, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

In that Annus Mirabilis 1793, a certain M. Récamier visited very assiduously *chez* Bernard. M. Récamier was a banker, very handsome, very gay, very charming, with the most delightful manners and the kindest heart. It was not at all wonderful that he should have fallen in love with the spring beauty of Juliette Bernard. There was but one drawback. M. Récamier was five-and-forty, and Juliette was hardly older than that other Juliet of the house of Capulet of Verona.

It was an occasion on which one might have suspected a case of tearful loveliness and obdurate, worldly parents. But such a suspicion would have been unfounded. Juliette of Paris accepted the prosaic, elderly husband with that perfect equability which was to preserve her beauty long past an age when other women have wept theirs into wrinkles and crows' feet. It was destiny—and not a bad destiny. Let us take it philosophically! If Juliette of Paris could not be called heartless, she had at least a very different order of heart to Juliet of Verona.

In the very thick of the Revolution, then, Mademoiselle Bernard became Madame Récamier. It is one of the tragedies or one of the alleviations of life, as one chooses to take it, that though one half of the world be dying, the other half must needs go on laughing, visiting, marrying, as under serener skies. M. Récamier saw many executions with his own eyes.

His house and the Bernards' were protected by Barrère. Did this girl-wife at home tremble for the fate that had overtaken many she knew, and for fear it might overtake herself? Perhaps. Her life at first was a very secluded one. The ardour of the Salons even had been damped at last by so much blood. There were nothing but public entertainments now. In France it will take the Judgment Day to stop those. So, behind the veil of enforced privacy Juliette Récamier's beauty rose to that dazzling loveliness before which all descriptions fail. Her biographers, indeed, speak of the exquisite complexion, the little rounded arms, the delicate figure, the clustering dark hair—and convey nothing. The great David painted her, and was driven to despair by a beauty no canvas could reproduce. Gérard had hardly more success. Later, Canova did her bust in marble. But what had marble and this warm, soft loveliness, with its tints of morning, in common with each other? If "the best part of beauty is that which a picture cannot express," Madame had that best part in an extraordinary degree. In the Louvre to-day thousands of people pass by her portrait unnoticing or disappointed. The sure testimony to the reality of her loveliness in life is the men who worshipped her, and Paris who went mad over it.

When the churches were opened again, Madame collected for a fashionable charity at St. Roch, and her impulsive countrymen got on the side altars, and perhaps swarmed up the pillars, to look at her. She

was no doubt serene, as always. Such a worship did not turn her head—hardly made that calm heart beat quicker. It was pleasant to be adored indeed—nay, it was the only thing worth living for. It was the end of education. Was it possibly also the end of marriage with a man who would treat one in all respects as a father, and guard one sufficiently from the effects of those passions it was so pleasant and so dangerous to excite?

M. Récamier took, and furnished with a royal splendour, a house in the Rue de Blanc, belonging to M. Necker, where another Salonière, much less calm and philosophic than Juliette, had once held her Salon. The *maison* Récamier was rising in the world. Beauty is a very long ladder to success, as every one knows. In 1799 Madame met for the first time, at a dinner-party, twenty-four-year-old Lucien Bonaparte, very vain, very fatuous, very susceptible, but with an adorable boyish smile. He fell in love with her. That goes without saying. Did she object to the infatuation? Lucien was the First Consul's brother. He wrote her a most passionate, absurd, simple letter. The lovely Madame had a little inspiration: treated it as an essay in novel-writing, and handed it back to the devout lover in public, advising him to devote his talents to better things. She was only the more charming when she was cruel. It is hardly necessary to say that the distracted Lucien wrote more letters. He signed himself Romeo. He was dreadfully roman-

tic and emphatic and young. Juliette got a little frightened, and told her husband the story. Lucien must be forbidden the house! And M. Récamier, with the easy optimism of his character, or the lax morality of the time, or with shrewd business instincts (or with a little of all three feelings, perhaps), replied that he could not offend the brother of General Bonaparte, and that though Madame must "grant him nothing," she must not drive him to despair. Poor Lucien! He suffered himself to be made a fool of for a year perhaps. Before that year was over the First Consul himself had condescended to admire Madame's loveliness, and presently tried to get its omnipotent influence on his own side by offering her an appointment, which she refused, as lady-in-waiting to the Empress.

M. Récamier's bank had been getting for some time into a very embarrassed condition. It happened at last that, unless the Bank of France would advance a million, the Bank Récamier must stop payment. With Fate's fine sense of the picturesque, there was a great dinner-party *chez* Récamier the very evening husband and wife were waiting the decision on which depended their fortune—perhaps the fortune of their lives. The strain was too great for pleasant M. Récamier. He fled to the country. It was Madame who received the guests, exquisitely dressed and smiling—tranquilly apologising, no doubt, for Monsieur's absence,—listening with a like divine sympathy to the

tittle-tattle of the hour or the best talk in Paris. The crash fell the next day. Madame took ruin very pluckily. She sold her fine dresses and her jewels, parted with the gorgeous plate, and finally sold the house in the Rue du Blanc. Her philosophy was admirable. Yet there was that in it which forces one more and more into the belief that she never felt any misfortune deeply, and owed part of her courage to that insensibility.

It is to the credit of impulsive Paris, that when its beauty became beauty in distress it fell at her feet, worshipped her, wept for her, respected her and loved her a thousand times more than ever.

Madame Bernard died in 1807, "becomingly dressed" to the end. In the summer of the same year Madame Récamier visited the de Staël at Coppet. These two women had for each other the attraction of opposites. Juliette was dowered with the beauty for which the de Staël longed, and the de Staël with the intellect Juliette must have found it so difficult to do without. Corinne spoke of her friend as "that beautiful person who has received the worship of all Europe, and who has never forsaken an unhappy friend;" and it is as she knelt, weeping, at the de Staël's death-bed, that Madame Récamier first met the most powerful influence of her life, Chateaubriand.

That summer at Coppet was not a little eventful. Prince Augustus of Prussia was among the de Staël's guests, and fell straightway head over ears in love

with Juliette's exquisite face and girlish airs of timidity. He was an impulsive person, this prince. He was not content to worship—a devotee before a passionless statue, who would accept the most burning devotion, and give in return a perfect smile and the touch of a marble hand. There is only one thing between us! Juliette must get a divorce from her husband! It is characteristic of the morality of the time that this proposal was not taken at all as an insult. Juliette's cool blood had been warmed ever so little by the lover's ardour. "Three months passed away," says her partial biographer, who can see nothing but good in her conduct, "in the enchantments of a passion by which Madame Récamier was deeply touched, if she did not share it." His hostess was the prince's "eloquent advocate." At last Juliette asked her husband to grant her a divorce. It is said that the generosity of his answer moved her to reconsider her request, but it is not unfair to suppose that she was also moved by the consideration of the inconveniences that divorce would bring upon herself, and by a true Parisian's horror of living out of Paris. She went back there with her mind made up to stay with her husband, and left her prince to think "of a happiness which must surpass all the most delicious dreams of the imagination," and to "confidently expect" she would become his wife. From Paris she sent him her portrait, and complacently received his rapturous love-letters. When she at last wrote to

him plainly, the news fell upon him, he might well say, "like a thunderbolt." She consented to see him every now and then during her life—that he might not quite forget how to love her—and had never an idea for a moment that her conduct was not completely generous and noble.

In 1811 Madame was exiled for visiting the de Staël at Coppet. She travelled in Italy, saw Canova at Rome, and at the fall of Napoleon returned to Paris and started her Salon under the Bourbons.

This Salon would appear to have differed widely from any of its predecessors. People did not come here to listen to its mistress's wit, to meet each other, nor—most potent of all attractions—to hear their own voices. They came to look at a woman's loveliness. Juliette sat on her throne to be worshipped. The dazzling complexion, the long lashes on the exquisite cheek, the little curls on the clear forehead, red lips, dimpled arms, milk-white skin—with such possessions as these what need has a woman of cleverness? The *habitués* of her rooms were her lovers. Three generations of the Montmorencies adored her. It was Adrien de Montmorency who said of the impression that she made on her contemporaries, "they did not all die of it, but were all wounded." A lover does not want wit in his mistress, or only just so much wit as will enable her to admire his. Madame had at least enough cleverness to manage her Salon without any. There is hardly a *bon mot* recorded of her. If she

had said anything it might have been the wrong thing. She herself suspected that, or knew it. Sometimes she put her handkerchief to her mouth to stop a burst of the most naïve girlish laughter. She felt, indeed, with that sound and curious intuition often given to stupid women and rarely to stupid men, that beauty alone would not, in a vulgar phrase, run a Salon, and used hers to attract and chain to her such various cleverness as that of a Chateaubriand, a Benjamin Constant, a Bernadotte, and a Canova. The last of the Salonières had as little in common with the caustic wit of a du Deffand, which brought all famous Paris to worship at the shrine of an old blind woman, as she had with the passionate sympathies of a Lespinasse, who had no need of beauty to make men love her. She was as far from the tranquil motherliness of a Madame Geoffrin as she was from the ardent conscientiousness of a Madame Necker, and had a prudent outward respectability entirely unknown to the careless lightness of a "black-locked d'Épinay."

When a further reverse of fortune involved the loss of most of her own money as well as of M. Récamier's, she separated from him and went to live in a "cell" in the Abbaye-aux-Bois. The cell was a Salon at once. It was in reality only a bedchamber furnished with a harp, a piano, a bookcase, a portrait of the de Staël, and a view of Coppet by moonlight.

It is part of the tact and delightfulness of a French

woman—and perhaps of Madame Récamier above all French women—that she was as serene and easy here as in a palace. Presently she was able to take a larger suite of rooms in the same house, and received there the Duchess of Devonshire, Sir Humphry and Lady Davy, the Earl of Bristol, Maria Edgeworth, Humboldt, Miss Berry, and heard read aloud, before their publication, the *Méditations* of Lamartine.

But the first *habitué* of her Salon, as well as the first influence of her life, was Chateaubriand. Her relations to this man are frankly set down by some people as infamous, and as hotly defended by others as innocent. Perhaps the truth lies between these two extremes. M. Chateaubriand began as a kind of *ami de la maison;* as a worshipper of a loveliness all Paris worshipped too. But there does not seem much doubt that, in spite of the existence of a Madame Chateaubriand, he very soon wished to be more than Madame Récamier's friend. It is entirely characteristic of Juliette that she delightedly received letters from him which had all the warmth of love-letters, and did not find it inconsistent with her honour to be told "to be with you is the only good thing." "To be loved by you, to live in a little retreat with you and a few books, is the desire of my heart and the goal of all my wishes." In brief, Juliette loved this man's love—until his love demanded the sacrifice of outward respectability, and of the homage even a bad world pays to a good woman. When, like Lucien and

Augustus, he asked proof of her affection, she drew back. She found it necessary to take a trip abroad. On her return she was able to feel that Heaven had "blessed her self-imposed sacrifice, and that henceforward the friendship of M. Chateaubriand would be as she wished it . . . calm as a good conscience and pure as virtue." Virtue! Well, perhaps. Madame's conduct may be summed up as never disreputable and always mean.

During those winters in Rome she had met there Queen Hortense, Madame Mère, her old lover Lucien, and the Princess Borghèse.

When Chateaubriand was made ambassador to the Eternal City, he, and Madame in Paris, exchanged many tender letters. M. Récamier died presently at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, his wife's Salon being given up to him. Their relations were quite friendly. Madame's exquisite serenity was very little disturbed. It was part of her charm that she was always sweet, cool, and patient. She went to Dieppe presently, the ozone of a gay watering-place being then, as now, a very favourite and effectual panacea for the afflictions of the feminine soul. In 1832 she again left Paris, to escape the horrors of the cholera year.

By now Madame was getting old, and failing in health. Her friends, Chateaubriand and Ballanche, were no stronger than she was. When in 1841 she made what may be called her last great public appearance, at the subscription *soirée* she got up for

the sufferers from the floods of the Rhone and Saone, she was sixty-four years old.

The scene should be immortalised on canvas. Here was Chateaubriand doing the honours of the Salon, and accepted according to long custom as its host. Madame Rachel was acting. Garia, Rubini, and Lablache gave their services. Here gathered the wit and fashion of that Paris which, since it worshipped Juliette's girl loveliness of milk and roses, had been through such disasters, anarchies, triumphs, horrors, chaos, as are not compressed into the history of another city in hundreds of years. The Salonière had still something of that loveliness which made men mad. As when one puts a hand into a jar of pot-pourri one sees again the rose, the garden, and the summer, so this woman kept to the last the divine fragrance of beauty. Care had scored few wrinkles on the face. The heat of passions had not seared it; the thousand emotions, hopes, fears, tendernesses of one absorbing affection had not written a history in the eyes nor drawn pathetic lines about the mouth. Juliette had still her calm, sweet smile, her easy grace of manner. She had resigned herself to "the first touch of time." She was not desperately trying to remedy the failings of old age by art. She was never desperate about anything. When a friend, who had not seen her for a long time, complimented her on her looks, "Ah," she replied, "I do not deceive myself. From the moment I noticed the little Savoyards in the

streets no longer turned to look at me I knew all was over." But to-night was a rejuvenation. It was the swan song of the loveliness which was this Salonière's métier; it was the swan song of the Salon itself. After this Madame was seen in public no more. Chateaubriand was much with her. Her beautiful eyes were attacked by a cataract, and she became almost entirely blind.

In 1847 Ballanche died and Madame Chateaubriand. Chateaubriand asked Madame Récamier to marry him. She refused. "Let us change nothing," she said, "in so perfect an affection." She was present at his death—still quite composed—in 1848. Less than a year after she died herself, of the cholera which she had always so greatly dreaded. Even that pitiless complaint left her beautiful. She lay like an exquisite statue, and Achille Deveria traced from her dead loveliness that *esquisse fidèle* which expresses "suffering and repose."

The chief events of Madame Récamier's life have been noted to very little purpose if her character has not been seen through them. One's life is only a theatre to display one's nature, after all; and what we do, is what we are.

Juliette of Paris was one of the women who received of the gods the two gifts of a perfect beauty and a perfect tact, which are often given in place of all else, and which, from a social point of view, are in themselves all sufficient.

They sufficed, at least, to make Madame Récamier the idol of her generation, "the fate of the Montmorencies," and the adored of a Bernadotte, a Chateaubriand, a Canova, a Ballanche. There was such a divine sympathy in her smile, her manners, her beauty, that that deeper sympathy which would have come either from having suffered, or from having been capable of suffering, a like sorrow to that of which she was hearing, seemed hardly necessary. If she was a tepid mistress, she was a very gentle friend. There is no occasion on record in which she was not serene, modest, pleasing, and perfectly even in temper. "That which she does not like does not exist for her." She was constant in her friendships. Change and tempest were hateful to her. It is not a little noteworthy that the lives which are written of her are not lives of Madame Récamier, but disjointed biographies of Chateaubriand, Montmorency, and Ballanche. There is so little to say about Madame! She wrote very few letters even, in that fine little hand. She had a kind of intellectual timidity, not a little charming—and safe. She seemed as if she were always saying, "*Look* at me. In that lies my strength and your weakness."

As a lover, Juliette wanted the admiration of all. If she was ever capable of a great passion, she frittered away that capacity in those delightfully perilous flirtations with her princes and her authors. But that capacity, if it does not demand a great intellect,

demands a great nature, a power of absorption in one aim, self-devotion, not seldom self-immolation. Madame had none of these things.

Her morals, which a present generation is apt too hastily to condemn from a very vague hearsay, seem rather to have lived on the border of immorality than to have crossed it. As she was too cool for passion she was too prudent for sin.

It was not unmeet that the Salon itself, as an institution, should die with a Récamier. It began as an intellectual power. When it had declined into a court of beauty, its end must needs have been near. Since the days when the Rambouillet gathered round her all the stars of the intellectual firmament, and lit her rooms with the spiritual fire of a Fénélon and the flaming eloquence of a Bossuet, it had indeed passed through a hundred changes. It had nourished in its breast the Free Thought which, put into action, was to emancipate men's bodies from the misery and oppression of a thousand years, and their minds from a hundred priestly delusions. It had been alternately a school of wit and an arena for the discussion of the deepest problems of the soul—fate, freewill, death, eternity. It had brought to birth more *bon mots*, epigrams, madrigals, fantasias, than had been produced by any other society at any other time. Under its fostering care a little shoot of an Encyclopædia grew into a tree whose branches reached to all lands. It was a playground for the light loves of a d'Houdetot,

a Saint-Lambert, a d'Épinay, a Mademoiselle d'Ette. It encouraged the virile vigour of a de Staël and the brilliant timidity of a d'Alembert. No social function in history can boast members a hundredth part as distinguished. Not content with a Rousseau and a Voltaire, a Diderot and a Duclos, it attracted from other nations a Grimm and a Holbach, a Hume, a Gibbon, and a Walpole.

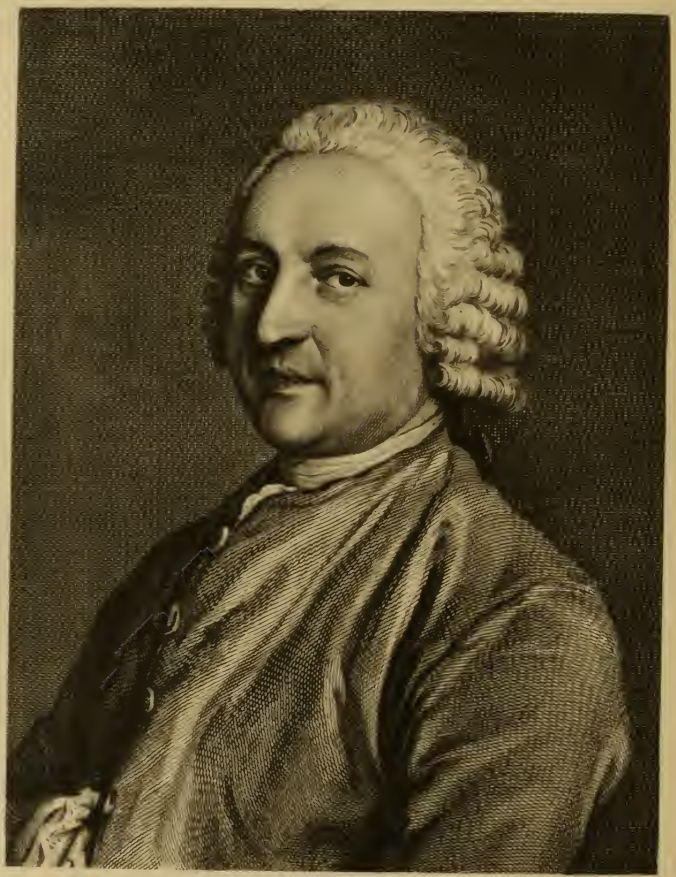
That it polished manners and brought to an exquisite refinement the courtesies and little social tendernesses of daily life, was not perhaps much, but it was something.

It gave an extraordinary impetus to book-writing. It flooded the world with memoirs which are become history. It produced some of the best letters ever written. It was the direct origin of innumerable poems. It inspired masterpieces and corrected them. Its effect on the Encyclopædia alone would have made it a literary influence without rival in the history of the world.

But it was as a moral anomaly that it was most remarkable. Here men and women, "whose chief ambition it was to excel in corruption and to be fancifully original in sin," were the first to discuss that purer morality and generous philanthropy which are the boast of the world to-day. The rights of men were first realised by the people who most trod them under foot. The Revolution was brought about by the class whom it first turned and rent.

The uses of the Salon are over, and so the Salon itself is no more.

It is not a good man who lies dead. It is rather a bad man who has wrought much good. It were unjust to remember that his morals were the morals of his age, and to forget that he originated ideas far in advance of it. So to this brilliant talker, with his light life and fruitful thought, be peace.



Walker & Cockerell ph. sc

Dr. Tronchin.

TRONCHIN: A GREAT DOCTOR

As there are some celebrities whom posterity honours unnecessarily, there are others whom it unduly forgets. Of these last is the Doctor Tronchin. Yet Tronchin had to his own day a wider influence and a more dazzling renown than his friends and contemporaries, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Grimm, and d'Alembert. His fame was not French, but European. Almost all the monarchs of the Continent were at some time or another his patients. He was the most enlightened medical man of the eighteenth century. He was all his life long fighting the ignorance and prejudice, almost universal at that date in his profession. He popularised innoculation in France. He flung open the windows in Versailles and let poor stifling, moribund royalty enjoy at least the free air of heaven. He was a practical influence upon thousands who were unmoved by Jean Jacques' "passionate appeals to mothers" and to the great Mother Nature from whom the Honour learned almost all his art. Deeply religious in an age of [illegible], [illegible] to himself and tender to others; the [illegible] of all stoics; wise, firm, strong, [illegible]—such was Tronchin, the good physician.

Dr Franklin

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He was born in Geneva in 1709. The atmosphere of his childhood was narrow, peaceful, puritanical. There must very early have been inculcated into the boy the principles which ruled the man, a strict devotion to duty, plain living, high thinking, and the noblest of all ambitions—"to find one's right work and to do it."

Theodore was still very young when his father, a rich banker, was ruined. But the loss of fortune is not always a misfortune, as every one knows. The boy was sent to England to be near a relative of his mother's—St. John, Lord Bolingbroke. My lord was in disgrace, so he had no place or favour to give away. But he had something better, for he directed Theodore's studies at the university—the boy went through the usual course at Cambridge—and introduced him to some of the most learned men of the age. Rather a serious nature had this Swiss undergraduate, it appears, beneath those charming and sympathetic manners which made him such a delightful companion hereafter. He had a very handsome face too, this "Apollo Tronchin" of the letters of Voltaire; so perhaps it was the easier for his fellows to forgive him that he was from the first a close student, and already devoted to that art to which he was to impart so splendid a lustre. Did he meet in England by any chance, one wonders, that coarse, kindly old fire-eater my Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who had lately brought from the

East a strange custom, highly disapproved by medical big-wigs, called innoculation? If the two never met, it was in England that the boy first heard of and studied that remedy. It needed an honest doctor, to be sure, to see the good points of a preventive of so "profitable a distemper" as the smallpox, and a brave man to push it in the teeth of learned opposition, to fight for it, single-handed, through patient, zealous years, against ignorance, contempt, ridicule, and that wilful blindness there is no enlightening, and to benefit the world in spite of itself, at last.

Theodore Tronchin began most likely that crusade at Cambridge—a penniless boy with all knowledge and experience against him, with nothing to depend on but his own brains, his own honour, and his own indomitable will. It was at Cambridge he first read Boerhaave, the great Dutch physician, who was responsible for the saying that it would have been better for the world if there had never been any doctors at all. The boy Tronchin had a passion for the man's writings, and then to be near him and study under him. He went to Leyden, and flung himself heart and soul into his art. He learned at the feet of Boerhaave all that Boerhaave could teach him. When it reached his ears that the master had said that M. Tronchin—handsome, boyish, Apollo Tronchin—devoted too much time to doing his hair, Apollo cut it all off, and appeared cropped

at the schools the next morning. He had at least one great presage of success — a single-minded devotion to his aim. He must have been, too, something better than a parrot learner, since at three-and-twenty he was practising as a physician in Amsterdam, with an ever-growing renown, only second to that of the great Boerhaave himself.

What was the secret by which this boy inspired confidence in every patient he attended? He was completely at variance with all the medical science of his age. No black draughts, blisterings, bleedings, drugs, and stuffiness for him. Fresh air, exercise, temperance—these were the heresies he preached. Forswear sack and live cleanly. Obey natural laws and you won't want to call in Us, with our pompous formulas and precedents, and our dear old time-honoured prejudices, which make medicine in this my day "the scourge of the human race." What wonder if this daring youth had already half the medical colleges in Europe about his ears? But Amsterdam made him inspector of its hospitals, and the Stadtholder would fain have had him as his first physician; and presently he was president of the city's medical schools. When he went back to Geneva in 1750, the Anabaptists of Amsterdam offered him 15,000 florins to return to them. He had been so unwearying, so clever, so kind, so honest! In that last word lay the crux of the matter, perhaps. Professional honesty was at a low ebb in this eighteenth

century, it must be confessed, and Tronchin rose to fame less because he knew so much, than because he was ready to confess he knew so little.

He carried on the same crusade in Geneva against the ignorance, prejudice, and hardness of heart which were degrading the noblest of all arts. He was never weary of insisting to his pupils on its splendour and dignity. He was always working for the health—moral as well as physical—of that poor little republic, rich only in virtues, which was all his life bound to his heart by strong chains. One likes to fancy him, like a Greater Physician, going about doing good. He set apart a certain time every day that he might see the poor and prescribe for them—free; and on a little table at his side there was a bag of money out of which he provided the means for the necessaries he recommended. A light of beneficence seems to shine always from that handsome, youthful face. Fame and applause began to reach him from afar off, and did not disturb its serenity. All the time he was fighting steadily, unswervingly, for that little Benjamin of his soul, innoculation, and the cries of "Quack! Knave! Innovator!" did not move him either. He was married by this time—not happily, it is said. But if there was some wound in his own soul, it only served to make him the more tender to the wounds of others; and his own sorrows, which he bore in a noble silence all his life, only prompted him to be the more earnest and the

more set to relieve, if that might be, the sorrows of the world.

In due time he innoculated his own children. Then a few more converts came to him, and yet a few more, and more. In 1756 he was called to Paris to innoculate the Duc de Chartres and Mademoiselle de Montpensier, the children of the Duke of Orleans; and M. Tronchin and his innoculation became a *furore* and the mode.

There are many sudden changes in the history of Parisian popular feeling, but hardly one so sudden and complete as this one. Instead of the most monstrous humbug and impostor, M. Tronchin was the saviour of his people, the one great benefactor of the race. Fashionable Paris flocked to him to a man. The street where his house stood was so blocked with fine carriages that all traffic was impeded. From having shuddered with horror at a quackery that would upset a dear old time-honoured institution like the smallpox, people would now have been innoculated three times a week if they could. The wit and beauty of the capital jostled each other in the great doctor's waiting-rooms. In the clubs one forgot Port Mahon, Minorca, the English, and talked Tronchin instead. The Duke of Orleans had given him ten thousand *écus*, to say nothing of jewels and gold, and he was already appointed physician to the Children of France. An enterprising milliner invented a *bonnet à l'innoculation*, daintily trimmed

with ribbons on which a sewing of peas imitated the spots of that fallen monster, *la petite vérole*. There was a Tronchin vinegar, whose healing properties, said the tradesman who sold it, were so great that it was not only useful, but necessary to carry about a little bottle of it on the person, in order that you might be able to rub it frequently on your hands and temples, and to enhale it. There was scarcely a gallant at court who had not come to be Tronchined. All the *migraines* and *vapeurs* of the capital flocked to touch the healing garments of this virtue and be saved. M. Tronchin was also enabled—and in spite, too, of the solemn faculty which surrounded them—to persuade dukes and princesses that even royalty cannot live healthily without some sort of ventilation, and a little occasional attention to the primary rules of sanitation. How his brethren must have hated, and did hate, a man not yet fifty years old who had effected changes so radical, and was about to effect others more radical still: who wrote with a dreadful clearness to the Doctor Boyer of Paris: "I know, and you know, that all our learning and study has not done away with those infamous persons in our profession, who every day and all day sacrifice to conventionality and prejudice the divine art which they dishonour:" and whose ridiculous obstinate notion "Prevention is better than cure" was certain to fatally undermine many very comfortable little fortunes in the faculty.

Alike through hatred and adulation M. Tronchin remained as he had always been, cool in judgment, fixed in purpose, wise, beneficent, and serene. He had done what the world would call much. But there was so much more to do! Paris used all her charms—they were not few in these latter days of the old *régime*—to keep him with her. She laid money, honour, rank at his feet, and he would have none of them. In his mind had long been another design, by which he would work more good, gain wider influence, and bring into mode principles which should work for the happiness of the race when innoculation had long been superseded by greater discovery than Tronchin would live to see. He returned to Geneva. He established there what would now be called a "cure," and began to exercise upon the habits and hygiene of women an influence far greater than Rousseau's.

It was no doubt at first M. Tronchin's delightful personality which attracted to the little, dull Swiss republic the butterflies of Paris, with physical ailments, real or imaginary, moral ailments only too certain, weak, witty, charming—the natural product of that supremely clever and silly age, the eighteenth century. Many of them had seen him in the capital. This dear doctor, with his sympathetic manner, his handsome face, his perfect understanding of one's symptoms and constitution! M. Tronchin, indeed, understood his patients much more perfectly than they supposed.

The hotels of Balances and de Sécheron in Geneva were soon filled with them; they overflowed into villas on the banks of the lake. "An ever-changing and renewing crowd of invalids, exclusively belonging to the French aristocracy," formed a unique and enormous *clientéle*. Here was the Duchesse d'Anville, "the philosophic duchess;" the beautiful Madame de Vermenou, "the image of Minerva," who solaced her illnesses with the society of many admirers, and was accompanied by the intense Mademoiselle Curchod—the future Madame Necker—whose diseases were always of the soul more than of the body. Here was Madame d'Épinay, the most graceful of all sinners, one of the especial "dévotes du révérend Père Tronchin," the friend of Rousseau, and the mistress of Grimm. Madame Denis came over very often from Uncle Voltaire's at Ferney, for Madame Denis was a *gourmande*, and constantly in need of the temperate counsels of M. Tronchin. Here was Madame d'Albertas, "*laide et coquette*," the wife of the President of the Grande Chambre of Aix-en-Provence. Here was the Marquise de Muy—"a very little soul," wrote the doctor, "enclosed in a very little body naturally feeble, and much debilitated by remedies." Here, too, came a rheumatic, dissipated duke or two, and the nephew and niece of the Cardinal de Tencin, that their only son might be innoculated. But the chief part of the crowd was made up of the pretty feminine vice of Paris, whose worst disease was sin, whose universal disease was folly, and who

found themselves, for the first time in their lives, for the most part, under the influence of a good man.

One understands the full extent of the great Doctor's tact and cleverness, supreme strength of will, and steady uprightness, when one reflects on the unpalatable nature of the truths which he enforced.

He preached Nature to the most artificial class of the most artificial people in the most artificial period of the history of the world. What is the matter with me, Doctor? Your life, Madame. Your card parties till three o'clock in the morning, your never-ending routs, balls, and masquerades—the stifling atmosphere of your houses, your vanity, your self-indulgence, your idleness. And what will you give me to cure me? Nothing, Madame. Fling aside the drugs and the drops, the pills and the potions, which you have been offering outraged Nature to appease her. Wash the paint off your face, throw away the ridiculous structure on your head, and the absurd hoops and wires which make movement an exertion and exercise an impossibility. Get up early, go out of doors, walk, live simply, read a little, even think a little if you can. What is the world better for a simpering doll, with a little shallow wit as her finest attribute, without the most rudimentary sense of duty or a single quality which can make men respect her? You have, and will have for ever, the noblest of all missions in life—but only one mission—to be a good wife and

mother. Not all the mincing frivolities of your day, nor the shrieking fanaticism of those (so-called) strong-minded sisters who will come after you, can alter that fact. You have the one great mission—and you have failed in it.

It was, no doubt, Tronchin's supreme glory that he brought back the mothers to the babies they had neglected, made them nurse their own children, and at least not ruin the race in its beginnings. The splendid scoundrel who wrote "Émile" was still polishing his wonderful periods in his "Hermitage." When the book appeared in 1762, Tronchin, the good physician, and the helpful helplessness of those powerful agents of his, the babies themselves, had accomplished their aim. Rousseau might have shouted his loudest, and not a woman would have heeded him, if the great Doctor had not already done his best.

One can fancy the life at Geneva. The *mondaines* of Paris began to meet each other out walking in the mornings in the most absurd, comfortable, walkable shoes one can imagine, carrying long canes, and wearing the light, short skirts called Tronchines, in which it was evidently possible to do something more energetic than sit about and feel beautiful. There were not any routs and balls here—so one could not go to them. Geneva was dull—horribly, impossibly dull. But were dulness and peace a little akin after all? There was the lion of Ferney, certainly, to go and peep at, by way of recreation. There were also

modest—very modest—little tea-parties *à l'Anglaise.* And when M. Tronchin — M. Tronchin was quite clever enough to know the importance of the day of small things—perceived one was getting really too bored, he would invite one to supper, and Voltaire's "dear Æsculapius" might be seen *en famille* playing whist very badly, and supposing himself to be playing it very well. The illustrious visitors also amused themselves by commenting freely on the ill-temper and *laideur* of Madame Tronchin, and of her husband's invincible goodness and patience towards her. "Et que fait Madame Tronchin?" said some one to the sprightly Madame Cramer. "Elle fait peur," was the answer.

Grimm came here to edit his *Correspondance Littéraire,* with the help of Madame d'Épinay, and to admire the wise, firm counsels of her physician. The Empress would fain have had the Doctor with her in Russia; and to Voltaire, who had aptly described himself as *toujours allant et souffrant,* Tronchin was a necessity.

There is no higher testimony to the Doctor's character, than his friendship with the patriarch of Ferney.

Is it possible that the great Voltaire was half afraid of the great Doctor? The diagnosis of M. Tronchin was so sure and penetrating, that he found out the sicknesses of the soul as well as the diseases of the body. The Prince of Sceptics would fain have had

M. Tronchin, with his deeply religious mind, believe that he too was almost persuaded to be a Christian. The Doctor listened without a word. He hated religious discussion, which always led, he said, to the profit of irreligion. And besides, he knew M. de Voltaire—to the core. When Geneva was flooded with blasphemous pamphlets, which the patriarch disavowed, he disavowed them louder than ever to his dear Æsculapius. Cannot one fancy the little, lean, withered cynic having a very bad quarter of an hour with the only man in the world who never lied to him nor flattered him, after the publication of that infamous "Pucelle"?

When a theatrical company of evil reputation would have established a theatre in the immediate neighbourhood of Geneva, Tronchin fought Voltaire tooth and nail for the morals and honour of his little republic—and won. This man never cringed. The greatness of the great was nothing to him. "I had always spoken the truth to him," he says simply of Voltaire. There is no record that that truth-telling offended any one of his illustrious patients. The path of duty was then, as now, the surest way to glory.

In 1766 M. Tronchin came to Paris as perpetual physician to the Duke of Orleans, and remained there for ten years. It was alike the height of his power and his fame. He used the influence he had obtained with an unwearied persistence. He recommended the fine ladies to polish their own floors, and the Court

gallants to chop wood. The renewed charges of quackery only made him smile. The quackery was in the loathsome nostrums of the Pharmacopœia, and not in a little honest work; and the common-sense of the laity had begun to find that out for itself. There must indeed have been then, as there are now, many patients who continued to suppose the more numerous the medicine bottles, the better the doctor; and others who would seem to have believed that a healing virtue lay in the physician feeling the patient's pulse and looking at his tongue, and that to obey orders was altogether a work of supererogation.

It was during these ten years that M. Tronchin freed the children from the "swaddling bands which deformed their bodies and ruined their health," and, never too busy or too professional to be abundantly compassionate, substituted innoculation *vésicatoires* for the incision which was at once painful and alarming to the baby patients. That famous *Correspondance Littéraire* contains a hundred allusions to his work at this period. Now it was an operation, hitherto unattempted, he had performed on a monkish patient for the relief of acute nervous pains in the head. Another day a grateful sufferer burst into poetry on the complete, and completely drugless, cure M. Tronchin had made of his case. Madame d'Épinay, whom the Doctor was now attending in Paris, spoke gratefully, poor soul! as well she might, of *mon sauveur* and of opium as "this

charming remedy." Galiani alludes to the iced sponges Tronchin recommended for blood-spitting. It was the Doctor himself who wrote to a patient this memorable sentence, "M'est il permis, Monsieur, de vous le dire? One must dare to do nothing. Men, and doctors above all men, fear less to make victims than to be suspected of ignorance. I repeat to you, fear the physicians more than the disease."

In 1778 Voltaire arrived on his last visit to Paris, and called in his old friend and adviser. Tronchin's counsels had lost nothing in wisdom and firmness. "Go back to Ferney," he said. "Your Marquis de Villette and your Madame Denis, with their interested advice that you should remain here, are nothing to me. Go back. The noise and flattery of this Paris will kill you. Go back while you can." The patriarch was continually bursting into tears, promising to go, and not going. The sequel every one knows. The great Doctor, full of pity, was at this death-bed, as at so many others. "I saw Voltaire sicken and die," he says, "and marked the difference between the serenity of the soul of a dying sage and the frightful torment of him to whom death is the King of Terrors." "La rage s'est emparée de son âme. Rapellez vous les fureurs d'Oreste." One is reminded of that *saeva indignatio* of a greater than Voltaire.

Another death-bed was even now preparing. Full of years and honour, having found his work and done

it, having brought infinite blessing to the race, greatly comforted sorrow, helped the helpless, strengthened the feeble, sustained the dying, M. Tronchin himself went the way of all flesh. His death was but the consequence of his life. What terror could that King of Terrors of whom he had spoken have for a man, who, the greatest anatomist of his day, had believed firmly in the divine origin and resurrection of the body—feeble and sin-stricken, no doubt, but so evidently and exquisitely adapted by a Master Hand in every function for the work it has to do? The fact that the innocent suffer, and will suffer, nameless diseases and horrors for the sins of the guilty, had not affected this man's faith in the perfect goodness of God; and that he had seen in his long life and shameful eighteenth century more of such sin and horror than the modern medical student who, from a brief hospital experience, can find no place for a Deity in the scheme of things, need not be doubted.

Tronchin died. There was hardly a celebrated man of his day who did not lift up his voice over that grave to honour it. But his true glory lies, not in "Portraits" and eulogies; not even in the tardy recognition of the faculty who fought him. The most ordinary practitioner of to-day knows a thousand things undreamt of in Tronchin's philosophy. The new truths he battled for against the world are but the alphabet of modern medicine. Who would have welcomed so eagerly as that generous and open soul the marvellous

advance in surgery and sick-nursing; the use of anæsthetics, a new faculty the most honest and enlightened the world has seen; the vaccination which has made his innoculation but a dead page of history?

Yet the sane, strong, and healthy of the race to-day may well pay the passing tribute of a thought to the man who, in the time of their by no means distant ancestry, made temperance and decent living the mode, and to be a good mother a European fashion.

THE MOTHER OF NAPOLEON

In 1750, when the Pompadour ruled France through its doddering king, and a certain ex-clerk called Clive had begun to expel the French from India and to lay the foundations of a vaster than any French Empire, there was born at Ajaccio, in Corsica, a baby girl named Maria Letizia Ramolino.

Corsica was then much as it is now, the engaging ne'er-do-weel of the island family, always brave, picturesque, and delightful, entirely unreliable and nobody's enemy but its own; the handsome boy with whom all the powers coquetted, and whom in turn Phœnicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, Greeks, Goths, Saracens, and Genoese loved and left.

In 1750 it was Italian. The little Letizia spoke a degenerate Italian as soon as she could speak anything, and spoke it as her mother-tongue to the end of her days. She came of a good family, though to come of a good family in a barbarous island two hundred years ago did not necessarily imply any very high degree of culture or refinement. Her father died when she was very young. She was brought up by her mother exactly as little Corsican girls always were—book-learning dangerous and unnecessary, the art of reading

The Mother of Napoleon.

itself a suspicious accomplishment, and writing admirable for signing one's name. But she was taught too, very early indeed, household "order, economy, the good direction of affairs," the whole art of marketing, and the practical arithmetic by which one makes a single greasy lira do the work of two.

One can picture the serious infant Mademoiselle Ramolino—very pretty and good—going marketwards, or to say her little prayers in the dark church hard by, through that *Place* which is to bear her name, past the white house where she is to live her young wifehood, and give a great man to the world. She was but a small creature when her mother, Madame Ramolino, married again and became Madame Fesch. When other little girls are playing with dolls, this one was gravely mothering a baby half-brother named Joseph. When other children are children still, blithe and careless, and with a child's gay thoughtlessness for the morrow, Mademoiselle Letizia, aged thirteen, was accounted marriageable and being briefly wooed.

Did Charles Bonaparte fall in love with a sweet, girlish face, innocent eyes, dark curls, grave mouth? He might well have done so. He was himself eighteen, "*doux, insouciant, dépenseur*," very little money, a lovely talent for verse making, and only a couple of stupid old uncles to raise objections to a premature engagement. While for Mademoiselle— Perhaps Madame Fesch, after the custom of those times, said, "Here is the man you are to marry; marry

him." To an older Letizia, one knows, duty was the master motive of life, and obedience to rightful authority a religion. But one would rather think, as one may well think, that in this case a girl fell in love girlishly with M. Charles' handsome face, brave air, and light heart, or that a motherly little person perceived that the lover wanted taking care of, and took care of him.

"Je me mariai à l'age de treize ans avec Charles Bonaparte qui était un bel homme, grand comme Murat." It was an old woman at Rome who recalled the husband of her youth—who forgot, perhaps, as she dictated these Souvenirs, danger, sorrow, difficulty, the great rising and the great falling which separated the present from the past—and was again for the moment the child Letizia, beginning the world.

The young couple at first settled—if such a word can be applied to any of their doings—in the white house at Ajaccio. The wife must have been at the most fifteen—Heaven help her!—when she knew the troubles of maternity without its joys and, herself a child, held a dead child on her breast. There is a little bust in marble by Chaudet of the Signora Bonaparte which must have been modelled in the early days of this early marriage. It represents a very sweet, thoughtful face, with hair curling on the forehead and the dress open at the throat to show a girlish neck. Is it only imagination that makes one trace in the lines of the serious mouth

and the tender gravity of the expression the sad little history of those two or three first babies, who died babies, of the childish wife who had so soon to be wise and prudent because the husband was so easy-going, debonnaire, and careless? It was Madame —even a Madame of "*treize ans*"—who was always the better man of the two. She knew it because she must have known it. There is hardly a nobler trait in a noble character than the fidelity with which she hid it from the world and obeyed, loved, reverenced the man she had married.

In the winter of 1767 he took her to Corte, the impregnable, dauntless little city founded on a rock, and there at the house of his uncle, General Cazanova, was born little Joseph, living and likely to live. In such a nature as Letizia's the tenderness with which she bent over her vigorous son was not without care for the morrow, and grave thought of how he was to be provided for and brought up. Corsica was disturbed as usual—or more disturbed than usual—which is saying a great deal. Genoa had just handed it over to France; and Corsica, objecting to the transaction, was fain to fight France under Paoli and make herself independent. Yet perhaps the quietest days of Letizia's whole life—the only quiet days in it one might almost say—were those she spent at Millelli, the Bonaparte "garden of olives" near Ajaccio, with her baby, for her convalescence, while Charles was paying a flying visit to Rome, and

over Corsica was the calm that comes before the storm.

The treaty by which the island became French was finally signed in the August of 1768. It might have been expected that the impulsive Charles, who was brave enough to make any woman love him, should throw in his lot with Paoli and be ready to fight for an inspiring leader and a free country, to the death. But there is only one woman in a thousand who can be a patriot when patriotism asks of her domestic peace, a husband and a child. Letizia was that woman. She was herself of that wild and picturesque company who, mounted on the little rough horses native to Corsica, came to Paoli at Corte and offered him their services and their lives. If with some it was the impetuous courage of the moment, it was not so with her. All her life she counted the cost of the tower she would build—and built it. She foresaw with a fatal clearness to what private ruin public spirit would lead—and did her duty.

She followed her husband through the first campaign. At the fatal battle of Ponte-Nuovo, when Paoli's troops were entirely routed by the French, this girl, with her child in her arms, encouraged her ruined countrymen with her own courage and enthusiasm. After that disastrous day, when only flight was left them, the young husband and wife, with little Joseph, fled for shelter to the caves

and rocks of the great frowning Monte Rotondo. Letizia already had the hope—if under such circumstances it could be called a hope—of being again a mother. What must she not have suffered? The hostile French were surrounding them; Corsica was ruined; in the wretched villages through which they passed the ominous silence was broken only by the heart-rending *voceri* and lamentations of the Corsican women. On the back of a mule this girl of eighteen went through the fordless rivers and the sweet dense macquis, or undergrowth which covers the country, with her baby in her arms and the boy husband for sole guide and protector. "I had no other thought," she said long after, "but of his danger and that of Corsica." He was always loving and devoted; but it was upon her own soul, and upon her own soul only, that she relied.

It was at her instigation, at her passionate wish, that he left her in the midst of danger and ill in health, to see the ruined Paoli set sail for Leghorn. When he returned, something of her history and courage had reached the ears and stirred the generosity of the French, and they offered the little party the first advantage of armistice and a safe passage to their home in Ajaccio.

With what an infinite sense of relief that young couple, travel-stained and footsore, must have gained that quiet white house, with its dull, cool rooms, after the burning midsummer heat and the fever

of danger and difficulty without! Their relations, after the fashion of the time and the country, gathered about them. Here came Uncle Archdeacon Fesch, Monsieur and Madame Fesch and their son Joseph, now six years old, as well as Madame Bonaparte, the mother of Charles. In the midst of them Letizia moved about her daily duties—a very notable housewife, a very wise mother, a beautiful woman who never thought of her beauty, a girl who did not expect to amuse herself, and who scarcely ever left the house except to go to the church hard by. She crept there very often, it seems, on these sultry summer days. If her child may but be born alive and strong, every daughter she has shall be called Marie and "vowed to the Virgin!" What a simple prayer it was, and from what a wise and simple heart it came! It is hard now to realise that there was then no premonition of the child's greatness in her mind, that she was only a Corsican girl, praying that in spite of fate, which had been cruel, she might be again the joyful mother of a living son.

On the feast of the Assumption she was brought hurriedly home from church, and in the morning of that August day, 1769, Napoleon was born. It is one of the great days of history. The little pallet bed, the narrow room, the white house itself, have become relics, sacred to hundreds of pilgrims of all nations. The escritoire where Madame wrote (a very

little), the harpsichord where she played, her sweet-faced picture on the wall, are now, for the sake of the child born that day, *vertu* almost priceless. But to Letizia he was but a baby whom she must love the more indeed because she had so suffered for him, who must be brought up righteously, and not allowed to be peevish because he was so frail. She nursed him herself—with the *nourrice*, Camilla Ilari, to help her when need be. His grandmother wanted to spoil him. Charles *would* laugh at his baby tempers. The Mammucia-Camilla indulged him after the fashion of her kind. Only the mother wanted his good more than his pleasure, looked with those lovely serious eyes to a future when he would thank her that she had been firm, just, consistent; treated him not as a plaything to nestle and caress, but as a man-child—gotten from the Lord.

Before Napoleon—the Nabulionello of the circle at home—was two, he had a little sister who died. Lucien, Elisa, and Louis were born in quick succession. The Bonapartes were poor enough, and getting poorer. Charles would seem to have been the kind of man who was always having his own and his wife's portraits painted and making pretty offerings to her *beaux yeux*, while he lacked the means almost to pay for the necessaries of life, and considered the future of his young family scarcely at all. It was Letizia who did that. With what a grave face she must have watched those babies playing in the garden at Millelli!

They had no one to depend on but herself. She taught them to the best of her ability—Corsican history and legend, love your country and fear your God—a brief education but not a bad one. She saved for them, pinched for them, for them grew into those frugal habits on which was founded later the charge of avarice. It is the only one her bitterest enemies have been able to bring against her character.

When Louis was a baby, little Napoleon, with his elder brother, Joseph, went to school at Autun. Whatever that parting cost the mother she showed nothing. Before they started she took the nine-year-old Napoleon to the "Pères Lazaristes" of Ajaccio and prayed their blessing for him. It was the Mammucia Camilla and the *bonne* Saveria who lamented and wept. There were no tears in the mother's eyes. She would have her boys be men —strong to do their duty. It is Napoleon who speaks long after of her "severe tenderness," and who says that he owed to her motherhood "all my fortune and whatever good I have done." She exhorted the little sons to courage—to courage! What need she must have had of it herself when the white sails of the retreating boat were like a gull on the blue Ajaccian bay and she turned home to work and care with the tears "the lids deny falling dreary on her heart"!

In 1780 she had a little daughter—"Paulette bien aimée." Directly she was well enough she took

Lucien to Autun, to replace Napoleon who had been promoted to Brienne. She found the Nabulionello of childish days very thin and working like grim death, while he—"My mother was then nine-and-twenty," he says, "and *belle comme les amours.*" Hers must have been, partly at least, the beauty of the soul, which trouble enhances rather than impairs, for at home the poverty was crueller than ever. Things looked for a while a little brighter when the eldest little girl, Elisa, got a presentation to St. Cyr. But in 1782 there was a new baby—Caroline—to think of, and in 1784 another little son—Jérome—and Charles sick unto death.

If the husband of her youth had not been the support and refuge he might have been, womanlike, Letizia had not loved him the less for that. He died away from her at Montpellier, tenderly cared for by friends, in the arms of his eldest, and with the name of his greater son on his lips, and his last thought for the wife he left to such dark days.

"At thirty-two," Madame says simply in those Souvenirs, "I was left a widow." She had neither time nor wealth for the luxury of grief. Strong, stern, and dutiful, she had at once to set to work to educate her babies and economise a hundred times more painfully than ever. It is said that at this time she lost some of the soft and fragrant charm which had marked her girlish loveliness.

What wonder? She had to fight the world for her children; for them to be alert, keen, active, shrewd. A French writer speaks of her expression of "surprising intensity" in her picture which still hangs in the white house at Ajaccio. That was the portrait of a girl—comparatively untouched by sorrow. It is of the Madame Mère of these early days of widowhood that Napoleon speaks when he says, "an excellent woman, an unequalled mother —with a courage and strength of soul above humanity."

He came back to her for a holiday in 1786, a year after his father's death, sick in mind and body, morose, despondent, bitter. They were all so deadly poor! What hope was there in the world for all these helpless creatures, forgotten in their barbarous island, and with the France which had conquered them, itself going laughing to ruin? Madame took Napoleon to Millelli. There, in that olive garden, under the shadow of the old oak tree, she would sit with him, talk to him, cheer him by the hour together. Times would not always be bad. There was my uncle, the Archdiacre, who would live with them and help them as far as in him lay. The State, too, *had* remembered them in the form of a very, very little pension. And over all was the good God.

Letizia had no learning, but a great wisdom. She was not prolific of caresses. Her love was in deeds,

not words. She won her boy back to health and hope, made him face the world again, with that splendid courage which was her own only armour against fate, and inspired in him that passionate reverence and affection for her character which only died with his death. It was this episode in his life which must have been before his mind when, at St. Helena, having thanked the doctor Antommarchi for his goodness to him, he added, "'But all that is not maternal solicitude. Ah! maman Letizia!' Et il se couvrit la tête."

When in 1789 the firebrand of the Revolution set France ablaze and the emigration began, Letizia wrote to Napoleon to tell him to stay where he was. She was the Spartan mother who, having given her son his shield, bade him come back with it or upon it.

She had need of him at home, too. In 1790 Pascal Paoli re-entered Corsica in triumph. By 1792 his designs to separate it from France and join it to England were manifest. Letizia would have none of them. When Napoleon did come home for a brief while, she inspired him, Lucien and Joseph—all boys in the early twenties—to declare themselves for the French. Paoli had not forgotten what manner of woman she had shown herself in that old war of independence. He sent her a message: "Madame, if you will write to the general that you disapprove of the conduct of

your sons you shall immediately take possession of your confiscated property." And she answered quietly, "Tell Paoli I should have thought he would have known me better. I have made myself a Frenchwoman, and a Frenchwoman I remain."

The fact that this reply made Paoli the Bonapartes' implacable enemy, and caused him to order that they should be brought to him alive or dead, did not make Madame regret the course she had taken, nor deviate from it by a hair's-breadth.

Her three boys were compelled to disguise themselves and fly—Joseph to Bastia, Napoleon to Calvi, and Lucien to Marseilles.

Madame was left alone with her children in the white house at Ajaccio. "You must only think of your mother," she had said to her sons, "when you have saved your country." She watched over the children night and day. She sat up till morning came again, and then lay down, dressed, to snatch a little rest. Every sound in the dark night, the common noises of the street in the long sunny day, must have made her think that their hour had come and Paoli's people were upon them. What was she to do? Resistance was impossible; submission, dishonour; and flight almost certain death. All the while her strong heart was torn with anxiety for the fate of the sons she had given to France.

Joseph Fesch, her half brother, was the only responsible person she had with her, and he was younger

than herself, and not the man she was. Presently an old relative consented to take charge of her two youngest children, Caroline and Jérome. The mother could very little have expected when she parted from them to see them again in this world. She kept with her Elisa, Pauline, and Louis.

The night comes when, waking up suddenly, she sees her room full of armed men. She thinks they are Paolists, and gets up, ready for fate. But they are her friends. "Quick, Signora Letizia! Paoli's people are close behind us. There is not a moment to be lost. We have come to save you or perish with you." She throws a few clothes on to the children, and the little party creep in silence with their guides through the sleeping town. They hear sounds of their enemies all about them as they pass through it. But their special Providence has not forgotten them, and they gain the mountains and the macquis in safety. Uncle Fesch takes care of Elisa and Louis, and Madame has little Pauline by the hand. The arbutus tears their clothes and the hands and faces of the children, whose cries break the ominous silence of the country. A brief rest is permitted on the heights of Aspreto, and the children lie down and sleep for a little. In the midst of them Madame sits upright, with her hands resting on her knees—thinking, thinking, thinking. They hear the church clock in Ajaccio strike midnight. Another day has begun—and what a day! In the very early morning it is Madame who gives

the signal to start. They are hidden in the high, thick macquis, while a Paolist band passes them, deciding to pillage and destroy the house of Bonaparte, and on the death of Cotte, one of Madame's escort. When little Elisa cries, torn and footsore, "Do as I do," says the mother; "I suffer, and am silent." During the day they see flames rising from distant Ajaccio. "It is your house which burns, Signora." "What does it matter?" she answers; "we can rebuild it more beautiful. Vive la France!" And they push on as before.

They come to a torrent presently, and the children, half asleep, are put on the back of the horse they have been lucky enough to obtain, and Letizia walks by their side. The guard are devoted to her. Her heroism would shame any coward into courage, and these are no cowards. One of them is justly remembered hereafter in a great man's will, written at St. Helena—"to Costa, of Bastelica, in Corsica, cent mille francs." They arrive presently at the country house of Millelli, but dare not stay. Does Madame think as they pass it of the days she spent there with baby Joseph, of the later days with a moody and despondent Napoleon? It may be. They press forward again.

History does not tell if, when they at last arrived at the seaport of Capitello, where Napoleon awaited them, or if, when they finally reached Toulon in safety, relief and joy robbed Madame for a moment

of the stoicism which danger and trouble had left untouched. It has been well said of her by a biographer that she was "the woman destined to support, with the equality of her great character, all the surprises of happiness, and all the catastrophes of misfortune." Misfortune had not done with her yet. They were in France, it is true, and together; but they had hardly any money, and no expectations of more.

They moved shortly to Marseilles. They accepted there, only too thankfully, the *pain de munition*, and the very little money doled out to refugee patriots. Napoleon, officer of artillery, gave them by far the largest part of his earnings. For their cruel necessities his pride accepted from a comrade, Démasis, 30,000 francs. When they arrived they had only the clothes they stood up in. Madame did the work of their little home with her own hands. If she had had any friends, which she had not, she would have been too poor and too busy to entertain them. She had her portionless daughters, Elisa, nearly eighteen now, Pauline, fifteen, and Caroline, thirteen, to educate to the best of her simple ability. While they sat at needlework—not a little in awe, one fancies, of the beautiful, grave mother—she would tell them legends of the country they had left, brave stories of their dead father, and of the war in which he had fought. As she had no book-learning herself, she could not give them any; nor could she, though she did her best, give to them the natural

soundness, justness, and clearness of her own mind, and that steady good sense which is worth all the learning in the world. It has been said that if she had brought up her children better, they would have been better in after life; to which it may be answered that she trained them for good *bourgeois*, and not for the thrones of Europe.

The low growl of the Revolution had now become a roar. Marseilles was declared a rebellious town, and the Bonapartes left it for a while, to return there in 1795. In '94 Joseph married Mademoiselle Clary, the daughter of a rich *négociant*, which a little helped the family fortunes. Louis was aide-de-camp to Napoleon, Lucien an *avocat* at St. Maximin. Junot —nobody in those days—wanted to marry pretty Pauline; but as Napoleon very sensibly said, "Tu n'as rien, elle n'a rien, quel est le total? Rien," and the marriage did not come off.

Another marriage, though, took place very shortly. Madame Mère distrusted Josephine from the first. Napoleon had not consulted her as to the step he was taking. Perhaps if he had she would have been chary of advice. She remembered the *esprit de principauté* in a little Napoleon, and knew well enough that the man would make his own fate, and, having made, abide by it without complaint. When Josephine became her daughter-in-law, Madame wrote her a letter, defective in spelling, certainly, but not in spirit, in good sense, and good feeling. Then Napo-

leon was appointed to the command of the armies in Italy. The Bonaparte fortunes had risen with a bound. When he came to Marseilles to bid her good-bye, "Te voilà grand général!" said Madame. Can't one hear the pride and tenderness of her strong heart beating in the simple words?

The victories in Italy made Madame of consequence in Marseilles. The tide of fortune had turned indeed. In 1796, through Napoleon, the English gave back Corsica to France. That must have been a proud day for Letizia. When she joined Napoleon at Montebello, "I am to-day the happiest of mothers," she said. She went back presently to Ajaccio with Elisa, now married to M. Bacchiochi. It is not a little characteristic that she worked so hard in setting things to rights in the old white house (only narrowly saved from burning) that she made herself quite ill. The mother of the man whom Paris delighted to honour, and who had just been invested with the confidence of the Directory, wrote very simple letters to a friend in France asking for white cotton cords for curtains, and, if you can find them, eight arm-chairs *à la mode* and in damask, with never a word of that great son whose fame was already European. Was the reticence prudence? It may have been. It is more likely that Madame thought now, as ever, that the way to win the world lay in each doing his duty to the best of his knowledge —my business is with white cotton cords for curtains,

and yours with a kingdom. Let each of us see to his own. It is a theory which all women who fancy themselves to have Madame Bonaparte's strong-mindedness, with souls above homely tasks, should well consider.

In 1799 Madame came to Paris, and with that coming began a new epoch in her life—the epoch of glory. Napoleon was First Consul, and to be, Emperor. Her other children were all married, or marrying, and their marriage portions were the kingdoms of Europe. The policy of Napoleon and the Creole instincts of Josephine made the Imperial Court only second to the Royal Court of the old *régime* in *éclat* and magnificence. Madame herself received a million of revenue and the title of Altesse Impériale, and was made the first Lady of the Legion of Honour. The Bonapartes had climbed to such a summit as might well make strong heads giddy. But one of them kept hers, and that was Madame herself.

What a contrast her grave, tall figure, in its simple dress, must have presented at the Imperial Court to the supple southern grace of Josephine and the light prettiness of Paulette! Madame was now about five and fifty years old. The snows of age had not touched the black hair which she wore curling on her forehead, and she had still the dignified carriage and the stately beauty of her youth. The daughters and daughter-in-law were gorgeous in a thousand

colours, outvying each other in modistic follies. Perhaps they were not too pleased when Mamma Letizia *did* appear at Court. Those clever eyes of hers saw so much—in fact, so much too much! She was not in the least afraid—was she ever afraid of anything?—of reproving their prodigal extravagance of expenditure, or their mean little squabbles over precedence and etiquette. At a family party one day, when Napoleon offered her the Imperial hand to kiss, "*elle le repoussa vivement.*" "Am I not your Emperor?" "And I," she replied, "am I not your mother?" And he kissed her hand in silence.

If it was beyond her power, as under the circumstances it might well have been beyond any human power, to make her children good men and women, she at least made them good sons and daughters.

She was glad enough to escape from those Court functions to quiet Joseph, with whom she lived for a while in the Rue du Rocher. She still spoke French very little and very badly. Her Italian was the Corsican-Italian of her girlhood. She retained a hundred provincialisms of speech, and she *would* call her great son, Nabulione. She was perfectly free from self-consciousness, stately, simple, austere. She did not much understand a joke, and she thought badinage frivolity. She managed to live for years beneath the shadow of a throne, the honest life of a devout *bourgeoise*, giving much to the poor, saying many prayers, thinking of her children, and saving for that

time when they would need the money they flung royally into the gutter to-day.

There was no stronger characteristic in Madame Mère than her profound distrust of Empire. She was not at the coronation of 1804. She always foresaw that day when vaulting ambition would o'erleap itself, and the Bonaparte star would set in a great gloom.

She remonstrated with her Emperor in very plain terms where she thought remonstrance would do good. But she was too wise to think that very often.

It was she who united with Josephine, whom she did not love, to implore from her son the life of the Duc d'Enghien. "You yourself will be the first to fall into the pit you dig this day beneath the feet of your family," she said to him in stern prophecy. And she addressed to him passionate reproaches with strong crying and tears. She should have moved him if any one could in this world. She defied him, as it were, when she took charge of the Duc's dog and other small possessions he left behind him, and herself gave them to his family. One must needs like her spirit. It was always her part to defend the weak against the strong, and of her children, to love the best those who suffered most. There is but one occasion on record when she would seem to have been a time-server, and that was when, after having for years defended Lucien's cause against Napoleon,

she did at last write to Lucien's wife and implore her, for her own sake and the sake of her children, to consent to that divorce on which the Emperor's iron will was set.

In 1809 was consummated the divorce of Josephine. To Madame it seemed an "*acte necessaire.*" Had not Josephine brought it largely upon herself? To a woman of Letizia's character, a wife who had been faithless to her husband when he was nobody, and only true to him when he was a great man, must have appeared peculiarly contemptible. To her primitive simplicity, too, a wife who had no children was but half a wife after all. France demanded the sacrifice of Josephine—and what must be, must be.

Madame was wrong, no doubt. But even when she was wrong there was a dignity and steadiness about her one half admires. Josephine's tears moved her to tears too, but not to yielding. She was sorry for the woman she disliked—and whom she had always disliked — large-mindedly, as it were, and without any petty spite.

But she signed the document in that illiterate writing of hers, with a firm hand not the less.

For her, the new Empress, daughter of the Hapsburgs, was not the descendant of many kings but the wife of her husband. When Marie Louise gave herself royal airs and tried to patronise Madame Mère, Letizia paid her back, with perfect composure, in her

own coin. It is only necessary to look at the portraits of the Empress and the Emperor's mother to know who had the best of *that* battle.

In 1811 Madame was one of the sponsors to her grandson, the King of Rome. The Empire was at its giddiest height of glory. The mother of the Emperor might have aspired to the noblest position of state to a kingdom. And she lived instead more retired than ever—many quiet charities through the agency of half-brother Fesch, very simple parties (doubtless sometimes not a little dull), a frugal court which consisted almost entirely of her own numerous relations. When Joseph and Louis abdicated their thrones, she had for them only the warmest sympathy and affection. Her mistrust of Empire deepened every day. "Nous autres Corses," she said—as she might well say—"nous nous connaissons en révolutions. All this will have an end, and what will become of those children whose imprudent extravagance looks neither to the future nor to the past? Then they shall find me."

After the campaign in Russia Napoleon accepted from her a million for his most urgent expenses. The little cloud of disaster, no bigger than a man's hand, which had been growing steadily since the divorce of Josephine, grew blacker and threatened to cover the sky. No misfortunes took Madame by surprise. When Fate smiled on her she saw the death's head behind the grin, and when it frowned she made

herself ready for battle. Before the crashing fall of the First Empire she said quietly to Cambacérès, "I shall not complain in what manner it ends, provided Napoleon comes out of it without any loss of honour, for to fall is nothing when one ends nobly, but to fall is everything when one ends disgraced."

Madame was sixty-four when she visited the great exile in Elba. She crossed from Leghorn in an English brig under the command of Colonel Campbell. She dined on deck every evening, and mounted on a cannon with "great agility" to get the first view of Napoleon's house.

Once on the island she would sit at work at her tapestry with a little portrait of Napoleon on the table before her. He had been dear to her in his glory, but how much dearer he was in his trouble, all mothers must guess. That she was entirely sad need not be thought. That she was far happier now that the blow had fallen than in those gorgeous years when the shadow of the fall lay always upon her heart, may well be imagined. Here Napoleon was all hers—as he had hardly been since she nursed him, a weakly child upon her breast. Paulette joined them presently, proving that amid her lightness and follies she had still the one great Bonaparte quality —family affection. Letizia began presently to visit the objects of interest in the island. From its rocky shores she could see the Corsica of her youth—Bastia,

where a stern and girlish Madame Bonaparte had reproved a too familiar father confessor, who was very justly thereupon deprived of his cure.

She, for whom the Fates had already spun so many surprises of disaster and glory, was not moved from her usual steady composure, when one moonlit night, the night of a ball, her son walking with her in the garden said to her suddenly—

"Je vous préviens que je pars cette nuit."

"Pour aller où?"

"À Paris, mais avant tout je vous demande votre avis."

Her advice! If she had thought of herself she must have said, "Stay here. Fame brings happiness to one man in a thousand, and to no woman. Here at least we are in peace and together. Stay."

And she answered instead, "Go and fulfil your destiny."

Madame followed her son to France, passing on her way close by the shores of that little native country she had so faithfully served. She was present on the 7th June 1815, when Napoleon received the oaths of the senators and deputies—beautiful still with the beauty that time cannot hurt, regular features, deep eyes, steady mouth, and that air of nobleness that comes from the soul.

Exactly a fortnight later two women walked in the garden of the Elysée dressed in mourning, and in a sorrow which had no words. They were Madame

Mère and Hortense, once Queen of Holland. Waterloo was over.

The last four fatal days of his abdication the mother spent at Malmaison with her son. What memories the place must have brought to him: of Josephine who always had his heart, and who, if she had been herself faithful, might have had his fidelity too; of the days of a power greater than any king's since time began—the power of a master-mind to manage men. And for the mother? "My mother is worthy of all veneratiōns," said Napoleon. She put herself on one side. That had been her attitude in prosperity—and hers the true greatness willing to make itself of no account. She only remembered now the needs of her son. She must be strong to help him. It was the supreme crisis of life, and they both must come through it "with honour." What words of pious comfort from her own steadfast, simple religion the mother uttered, history does not tell. If she gave counsel for the future, or bade her son look back for consolation on a past more glorious than any other had achieved or would achieve, is not known. When the day of farewell came, the few faithful friends remaining to the Emperor said good-bye, and left weeping. The mother and son were alone. Two tears stole down Madame's beautiful old face. "Adieu, mon fils." Happy he who does not recognise from some experience of his own the desolation in those three words!

A few days later Madame wrote to the Cardinal Consalvi, "I am indeed the mother of sorrows." On the 15th of July she arrived with faithful Joseph Fesch in Rome. A little later she wrote and begged the allied sovereigns to allow her to join her son in St. Helena. The request was refused. The woman accused of avarice offered the Emperor her whole fortune. And when it was suggested to her that she would be ruined, she looked up with a fine flash of her brave old spirit and said, "What does it matter? When I have nothing I will take a staff and beg an alms for the mother of Napoleon."

She wrote later again to the allied sovereigns to implore her son's release from that death by slow torture, St. Helena. They did not even reply. She had to content herself in those long days with recalling little traits of the childhood and infancy of that dear Nabulionello.

She lived very quietly, seeing very few strangers, the Pope sometimes, and her children constantly when they were in Rome. When that fair-weather wife Marie Louise offered to visit her mother-in-law, "The woman of whom you speak," said Madame Letizia, "cannot be my daughter. She is doubtless some impostor who tricks herself out with our name, and I do not receive impostors." Then the Emperor of Austria, Marie Louise's father, sent his aide-de-camp to Madame to announce that it was his royal pleasure to wait on her. The misguided messenger began in

a loud voice, "His Majesty the Emperor of Austria, my master—" On which old Madame, rising to her full height, replied, "Go, sir, to the Emperor of Austria your master, and tell him that he and the mother of the Emperor Napoleon have nothing in common."

Nor did she more easily forgive her own daughter for Murat's treason to Napoleon, and never accepted Caroline's excuses that she was not responsible for her husband's actions. "Madame replied, like Clytemnestra, 'If you could nōt command him, you ought to have fought him.'" Where is there another woman with so dogged a courage of her opinions as Madame Mère?

In 1821 he of whom an Englishman said that he "had rendered past glory doubtful and future fame impossible," knew that his hour had come. There is a strange story of a ghostly visitant to the waiting mother at Rome on the day and moment when the great spirit left the body. It was not till two months and a half after his death that the news of it reached her. She remained long "without movement, without voice, without tears." It was the final test of her heroism. "My life," she said herself, "died with the death of the Emperor. Then I renounced everything for ever." When Dr. Antommarchi came to see her with the news of those last days in St. Helena, her emotion was so great he dared not tell her all. When he came a second time, she was calmer. She inter-

rupted him now and then with sobs. "I stopped. She dried her tears and resumed her questions." On his third visit she had regained that self-mastery which had stood her in noble stead through almost every vicissitude of human experience.

On the 15th of August 1821, she wrote to the Marquis of Londonderry, the Minister of Foreign Affairs for England, to beg the remains of her son. "The mother of the Emperor Napoleon reclaims from his enemies the body of her son. Fallen from the summit of human greatness to the lowest degree of misfortune, I do not seek to move the British Ministry by the record of the sufferings of its great victim. . . . Can the English Government continue to extend its iron arm over the corpse of a foe? I demand the ashes of my son: no one has a greater right to them than a mother. . . . He has no further need of honours—his name is sufficient for his glory—but I have need to embrace his dead body. Far away from the tumult of the world I have prepared a grave for him in a humble chapel. In the name of justice and humanity, I implore you not to refuse my prayer. . . . I have given Napoleon to France and to the world; in the name of God, in the name of all mothers, I come to beg you, my Lord, that I may not be denied my dead son."

If it be suggested that this was not the composition of an unlettered *bourgeoise*, it may be answered that

there is no finer language than the passionate utterance of the heart, and no better teacher of style than a great emotion.

Madame's request was refused. She did not live to see that day when the ashes of Napoleon were placed, as he had desired, on the banks of the Seine and in the midst of the French people he had so dearly loved. From the date of that refusal the mother asked nothing. The sun had set, and the shadows of the evening were about her path. For her had come the time of resignation, of far thoughts, of many memories, of many prayers. What a long twilight it was to that gorgeous day! "Paulette bien aimée" died at Florence in 1825, and Saveria, the *gouvernante* of the days in old Ajaccio, in the same year. A very slight old figure always dressed in black in the fashion of the Empire, and with dark eyes still very bright and penetrating, became well known in Rome, going daily to mass, or walking sometimes among the ruins. She was living, too, in the ruins of her own life. The King of Rome died in 1832. Perhaps because Fate had already hit her so hard, that blow seemed by comparison light. All she lived for now was to do good. She was very fond of a young granddaughter, Princess Charlotte. When she became too blind and infirm to do much else, her faithful companion, Mademoiselle Rose Mellini, would read to her by the hour together. Oh, what thoughts must have lain behind those sightless eyes as the old woman listened

to the history she had helped to make, to lives and memoirs of that great man whose life and memory she kept, like another mother, hidden in her heart! She dictated indeed some of her own Souvenirs—very simple, very short, very homely—as if she would say, "I am nothing, but for what I remember of the babyhood of the man I gave the world, hear me a little." She recalled too a memory of Elba, and the fatal news of the Emperor's death. That is all, almost. She was old, but not yet to die. Heaven help her! when she said of herself, "My son died miserably far from me: my other children are proscribed. . . . My grandchildren, who promised best for the future, all seem destined to disappear. I am old, forsaken, without glory, without honour — and I would not change places with the first queen in the world."

There spoke, if there ever spoke, the spirit of a great woman.

At last, on the 2nd of February 1836, at nearly fourscore years and ten, having known France as conqueror, enemy, friend, kingdom, chaos, republic, the empire of her own son and Bourbon kingdom again, and having experienced the extremes of poverty and riches, of obscurity and glory, of flattery and contempt, died Madame Mère.

By her bedside were his Eminence Cardinal Fesch, whom a little Mademoiselle Ramolino had nursed as a baby, and Jérome, her youngest born. She went

to death exactly as if she had gone to sleep. She had worked so hard she must needs be glad to rest at last. In the cameo by Coquille, taken the day after, the serene and firm old face wears a smile.

The Government of Italy, not to offend France, commanded a very simple funeral. That was as Madame had wished. It would not permit the Bonaparte arms on the door of the mortuary chapel. But on the pall beneath the spreading wings of the imperial eagle was inscribed:—

L. R. B.

MATER NAPOLEONIS.

Not all the flattering lies on costly monuments, nor the finest eulogies of court sycophants, could have made a nobler epitaph.

What was this woman? Her figure stands unique in history. One knows of no other at once so clever and so wise, so great and so willing to be little. This was she who, in a position of power, neither managed nor intrigued—who was so self-effacing that posterity has effaced her too, and forgotten her pluck like a man's, her strong courage to act where action would do good, and her finer courage to sit still when action was useless. Her iron will and dogged mind were hardly womanly perhaps. This was not the gentle angel of the domestic hearth with the tender virtues

to soothe and bless—but the heroine to fight the world for her children, to die for them, if need be, with her face to the foe, or—a harder thing—to work for them all day long, to bring them up honestly in bitter poverty, and decently, in that "universal corruption of manners" which attained its height in the Revolution.

Deep and stern in her affections—love is not what you feel for your children but what you do for them —Madame Mère was a better man than any of her sons, save one; yet never forgetting that her sex is "an inferior part of the creation," she obeyed, as her noblest duty, not only Charles, husband and master, but her son Joseph as head of the family, and Napoleon, born with the right divine to rule the world.

As for the charges that have been brought against her, they may well be admitted.

Penurious? Yes. Madame had been through such poverty as no one can experience and forget. Mean even? To herself, but to her children and the poor most generous; always saving, but always to give away. Ignorant? Absurdly ignorant: letters written by some one else and signed with difficulty "Madre"; preposterously ignorant of everything but life and the art of living rightly. Unpolished? Rough. See Corsica to-day, and it will be easy to understand that the noble families of the Corsica of a century and a half ago *would* be rough. Manners defective. No wit

herself and suspicious of wit in others. No small talk. No gracious flatteries.

In short, Madame Mère was not a great lady but a great woman.

As that, and the mother of a greater man, she may be well content to go down the ages.

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ

When Napoleon said that reading Madame de Sévigné was like eating snowballs, when Horace Walpole worshipped at the shrine of such a grace, softness, and delicacy, when old Mary Montagu characterised the whole correspondence as "always tittle-tattle," and Lord Chesterfield deigned to admire its "ease, freedom, and friendship," each critic had no doubt a little right on his side, and the truth lies somewhere between them all.

Marie de Rabutin Chantal, who is to this day a religion among all Frenchmen, and was herself French, not only by birth, but by every instinct and quality of her character, was born on a certain day in February 1626. Her father died when she was a baby, her mother when she was only seven years old, so that the little creature knew nothing in her own childhood of the maternal affection which she was to turn hereafter into a fine art, and which was to make her a name for ever.

Her uncle, Abbé of Coulanges, brought her up in the country quiet of his priory at Livry. What a fresh breath of spring this gay, soft, quick, bright little French girl must have brought into that

Walker & Cockerell ph. sc.

Madame de Sévigné.

studious atmosphere of mystic piety, and to the grave Jansenist philosophers, my uncle's companions! She had Ménage and Chapelain for her tutors. She learned Latin, Spanish, Italian, and wore the weight of learning now, as she wore it all her life, "lightly like a flower." She was only sixteen, with the innocence of that calm life still upon her, when she was presented at the brilliant court of Anne of Austria and received with a truly Gallic transport and enthusiasm. She had those "yeux bleus qui rêvent en regardant." She had "cette fleur printanière de teint." She had the sweetest brightness, naturalness, charm. She was so fresh and so gay, so kind, happy, and girlish. All her biographers are in love with her. They would not be French if they could refuse to adore such a divinity. It is only one of them who suggests that she could have needed anything to complete her perfection—and that the deepening touch of sorrow.

It came to her—do not all the worst troubles of life come this way?—through herself. She was not yet two years away from her priory when she fell quite romantically and absorbingly in love. She had a very pretty *dot*—but then she had such a pretty wit and such a pretty face that she did not need its superfluous attraction. M. de Sévigné was brave, handsome, a soldier, and at the moment himself delightfully in love. Did any one whisper to Marie his character of *amant volage?* Perhaps. Can't one

fancy the charming indignation with which she repudiated such a calumny, and, if the *convenances* permitted the lovers a little more intimacy than is permitted French lovers nowadays, going to him and telling him, and listening to him and loving him and believing in him a thousand times more than ever? One may be quite sure that Marie's passion was not the less blind because she was a clever woman. Her uncle, too, approved of the match. Everybody approved of it. The sun shone on it with that cloudless brilliancy that comes before the rain. And they were married.

For a year or two, perhaps, Madame—such a girlish Madame—found, if not the complete realisation of her dreams, at least, one hopes, that happiness which is "the perpetual possession of being well deceived." Monsieur introduced his wife into the Salon of Madame de Rambouillet, and the young pair moved in a world lit by such various stars as Bossuet, Molière, Pascal, Corneille, Fénélon, Boileau, Racine, Rochefoucauld, and Bourdaloue. Marie, indeed, who was familiar with the works of Ariosto and Tasso, had tasted Virgil and Homer, and listened from a child to Chrysostom "with his glorious mouth of gold," was no unfit companion for the immortals. *Her* learning, one may be quite sure, did not make her dull and pedantic. She had the exquisite taste, the perfect tact, the *esprit* and the *spiritualité* which make a cultivated Frenchwoman the most delightful woman

in the world. If the immortals did not yet recognise a peer, they were all more or less in love with such a charming personality. They wrote her sonnets and worshipped her. They took the little, fair, kind hand and kissed it, as it were. Her name was on all lips. It was only the scandals of a scandalous age which contained no mention of her; for the girl-wife looked over the brilliant world at her feet at the husband of whom it was said, "Il aimait partout," and still loved and believed in him.

She was a little bit glad, perhaps, all the same, when he left Paris—and temptation—and took her to Les Rochers, his seat in Brittany. Madame had a taste, most unfashionable, for country sights and sounds. The sombre garden, with its long avenues of old trees and dark hedges of holly and thorn, did not seem dismal to her. She invested the solemn house, with its long silent salons, with the charm she brought everywhere, with gaiety even. Here at least Monsieur was all her own. They were retrenching their expenses, which was just as well, and showed how happy one could be modestly and simply. A tender hope was dawning in her girlish heart, which found realisation when a little son lay on her breast. A year later, her daughter—"the unique passion of my life," the child more beloved than any child in all history—came to crown her blessings. One likes to think of her thus—with her husband faithful, or at least not known faithless,

with the babies getting more and more wonderful and intelligent every day, with the gardens blooming with summer life, with the world lying fair before her. Her happiness did not last very long. Is it in the nature of such happiness to last? One must be thankful to have even sipped the cup. Monsieur was called to his regiment by the war of the Fronde, and Madame came back to Paris—to its brilliancy and dangers, to its lightness, passions, temptations—just as the boy Louis XIV. was entering it in triumph with his mother and Mazarin.

It was in Paris that Madame met again Bussy Rabutin, her cousin, and that Monsieur fell under the spell—a spell all Madame's girlish charms could not break—of Ninon de l'Enclos. Cousin Bussy had made before this the finest protestation of love for Marie, it seems, and had been laughed at a little, so that it was not very wonderful that he now felt it his duty to acquaint her with her husband's unlucky infatuation. She received the news with not a little dignity. If Bussy hoped she would now lend a more ready ear to his own vows and fervours he must have been very much disappointed. In an age when gallantry was the mode, this woman's character was always in the pure air beyond suspicion. There is, indeed, no higher tribute to it than Bussy's own malicious account of his cousin in his *Histoire Amoureuse des Gaules*. The defamer can find nothing to defame.

Madame took Monsieur's madness in silence. Did

she suffer greatly? Who knows? She acted, at least, with a judgment and sanity that not one woman in a hundred would have displayed in her circumstances, and only left Monsieur presently through the urgent advice of her more than father, the Abbé de Coulanges. She took the children back to Les Rochers, and was not, one hopes, all unhappy. As she played with them in the summer gardens, ugly rumours of her husband must, indeed, too often have disturbed her peace. At length came the news of another infatuation, of a duel, of a mortal wound; and Madame wrote to the man who had wronged her that letter with a cry in it—that letter of "sorrow, despair, and pardon"—and found herself a widow at five-and-twenty.

She spent the next three years in retirement with her little son and daughter. They lived in the greatest simplicity to repair the fortunes Monsieur had ruined. The Abbé helped Madame a good deal, and she stayed with him often. She administered the estates of Bourbilly and Les Rochers with that shrewd and practical common-sense, which in Frenchwomen, and in very few other women in the world, is compatible with all the most unpractical of graces and charms. And then she reappeared at Court.

It was an epoch. She was not yet thirty years old. If she had lost something of the dewy freshness of the girl—only her biographers say that she never lost it, but remained softly young for ever—

she had gained in wit, in confidence, in sympathy. She had further cultivated her mind in the long solitudes at Les Rochers. She had suffered. She had had much to forgive—and had forgiven. There was no trace of bitterness in such a nature. She still loved life and wanted to enjoy it. She was ready to begin the world again with the happiest zest. She took the newest naïve delight in the balls and parties. She knew everybody once more, and everybody wanted to know her. De Retz, the Duc de Rohan, the Prince de Condé, Montrose (afterwards the Martyr), Madame de la Fayette, were among her friends. If the king for a while looked coldly on her, those great spirits which made the king's Court the most brilliant in Europe could not but do homage to such a cultivated womanly intelligence. Madame bewitched the grave bishops, very likely, with the exquisite "drollery" which captivated staid Fanny Burney more than a hundred years after. She moved from one great light to another. She always said the right thing, and said it perfectly. She danced gracefully, one may be quite sure, as she did everything. She was an amateur actress of not a little ability. She made the acquaintance of the Arnaulds, the great fathers of Jansenism. She went to the fashionable sermons in the intervals of the fashionable parties, and was moved to the softest emotion by those burning discourses. Conti and the great Fouquet (with a crowd of lesser lights long

forgotten) were in love with her. Of her own feelings to Fouquet it has been said that she was less than lover and more than friend. She followed his trial at least with a breathless anxiety. She came to Paris before its close that she might hear the best, or the worst, at once. "L'espérance m'a trop bien servie," she wrote at the last minute almost, "pour l'abandonner." Her gentle sanguineness lightened indeed this trouble for her, as it lightened all the other bitternesses of her life. If any man again touched her heart, that man was Fouquet no doubt. But he had a rival too powerful for him, a rival to whom all Madame's gentle soul had been long given, on whom every hope and desire of her life was fixed —the little daughter growing to womanhood at her side.

It must have been a pretty picture when Madame presented *la plus jolie fille de France* at the French Court. The mother had no thoughts but for the child. Her own fascination and beauty were nothing to her. She could not think of anything but of Mademoiselle's loveliness, which was in point of fact exquisitely regular and uninteresting. One cannot find out, indeed, what there was in this girl, with her tepid disposition, her dull, exact little mind, to inspire an affection which in all the history of the human heart has scarcely a parallel. "Au premier moment," wrote Mademoiselle herself, with a delightful naïveté, "on me croit adorable et quand on me

voit d'avantage on ne m'aime plus." There was, indeed, no reason why one *should* have continued to love her. But the maternal passion requires, it seems, very little from its object. Perhaps Madame's heart set itself so upon this child when the husband of her youth betrayed her. It may have been so. The date and reason of the origin of that supreme attachment matter, after all, very little. It has become immortal.

Can't one fancy how fondly and anxiously the mother watched the daughter at those fine fêtes and masquerades? She was not a bit pleased when the great people flocked about *her*. Perhaps some of her admirers found out that the way to gain Madame now (Madame was exquisitely human and had hitherto liked flattery and admiration a little on her own account) was to admire her daughter. One does not know when the mother first found out—or if she ever found out—that Mademoiselle had judged herself rightly, and that her dull beauty soon bored people and that, though she attracted admiration, she could not keep it. It was certainly not very long before Madame was wondering over *la bizarrerie du destin*, in the difficulty of marrying the prettiest girl in France. Was it because the noble houses were afraid of making an alliance with a family not in too good favour with the omnipotent king (one must remember Madame's firm friendship with the disgraced Fouquet); or because the mother's gentle sensibilities

had been too much attracted by the unpopular Jansenism; or because only of the *tiédeur naturelle* of Mademoiselle's disposition? One may be quite sure that the last was not the reason Madame assigned for her disappointment.

The pair went into the country presently; and then were recalled to Paris by the gorgeous fêtes given to Madame de Montespan after the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle. The morality of the age was such that the most careful of mothers would not have hesitated to introduce the most innocent of daughters into society which was not questionable, because of its evil manner of life there was no question at all. When the king discovered Mademoiselle's beauty and danced with her, could Madame help being flattered? The admiration was only a pretence, it turned out, to cloak a real passion for the Montespan; and it was not very long before the Court heard one morning that Mademoiselle was to be married to a Comte de Grignan, who was rich, forty years old, and had had two wives already.

It was not a love match, to be sure. Had Madame's own experience of love matches been so happy that she should wish her daughter to follow her example? Since one must marry, it seemed, or be buried alive in a convent, the Comte was, everything considered, as good a *parti* as Mademoiselle was likely to get. Most of his relations had obligingly died, said Madame gaily in a letter, which was really most good-natured

of them. The Comte was well off. Mademoiselle was quite passive and indifferent. And—and—Madame had every reason to hope that her son-in-law might obtain an influential post at Court, and that she might keep her daughter with her in Paris.

It is to the death of that hope that one owes one of the most famous series of letters ever written.

Madame had been a correspondent of some little repute before this. Her letters to other persons have at least traces of the carefulness which was characteristic of an age when letter-writing was a fine art. But in the letters which have made her celebrated for ever she had no thought of celebrity. It was the mother talking to the child. It was the intimacy of the fireside—of the most simple and domestic of all affections, "Madame cause."

She wrote from "*chez* Monsieur Rochefoucauld," or from Vichy, where she was taking the waters. She wrote night and morning, that there might be no post which did not bring a letter from her. Could Madame de Grignan have been a hundredth part as eager to hear from her mother as her mother was eager not to miss a single chance of writing? She wrote to-day in May-time from the garden of Uncle Coulanges at Livry to the music of nightingales; from the *coin du feu* in winter at Les Rochers; from her dearest friend's, Madame de la Fayette. She went straight to her escritoire (and the "ebony cabinet for pens and paper," which Horace Walpole cherished long after as

a memory of the most delightful woman in the world) when she came home from a court ball, "at five o'clock in the morning." She was never tired or too dull to talk a little with that dear daughter. As her easy pen ran over the paper, the distance between them dwindled into nothing. The mother sat again with her fond hand upon the child's—with her fond eyes looking up into the girlish face—"Madame cause."

She wrote about everything—and about nothing. About the balls and the comedies at St. Germain; who had asked after Madame de Grignan, and had praised her beauty and her disposition. Here was a little criticism of a modish poet or painter, and half a page about Madame de Grignan's health. "Votre maigreur me tue," says the mother, and "Conservez-vous, c'est ma ritournelle continuelle." She had a charming little Court scandal to tell her daughter the next morning; or an account to give her of La Vallière at the Carmelites. She confessed to her with a most bewitching humility her passion for *les vieux romans.* She was *folle de Corneille,* she said. She had been to hear a "delicious" sermon (the adjective is perfectly characteristic) of Bourdaloue's this morning, and to Court at night. She had a little argument with her daughter about faith and philosophy—the mother being all for faith, blind, complete, devoted, and the daughter all for independent and reasonable thought. Here she was writing

of Madame de Maintenon's unique position, "Il n'y en a jamais eu et il n'y en aura jamais;" or reading St. Augustine "with transport." Now she was laughing softly over the peccadilloes of her scapegrace son; or describing the death-bed of the Princess de Conti. The daughter wrote solemn maxims on hope and patience and sent them to her mother, and the mother, who to the end of her life was much the younger of the two, wrote back to lightly chide the daughter about neglecting her dress and appearance. Of Rochefoucauld's maxims, said Madame, "Il y en a divines;" and also wanted Madame de Grignan "to put her nose a little into the Book of the Predestination of Saints." And then again she was talking just as she must have talked in life, of nothing, nothing, nothing; of trifles lighter than air; of things that were great then, or great to her, and are less than trifles now, with an immortal name shining here, and just once or twice a priceless glimpse of history—and again nothing, nothing, nothing. "Madame cause."

It is this nothingness which made Napoleon say with perfect truth that one is no further on when one has read her. But it is also this nothingness which has endeared her to many generations of French people, and by which she still makes her appeal to the heart.

Madame wrote, in fact, in the "little language" of love. She spoke to her daughter about home and children, the trifles of every-day life—and behold! it

is what the simplest mother among her readers might say in substance, though not in form, to her own child. Madame's fears for her daughter's health and safety are only the echoes, after all, of anxieties every human being has felt for some one dear to him. In her partings, one relives one's own. The desolation of those good-byes, the hopelessness of the long outlook when they are said, the trembling anticipations of reunion (trembling, for fear Fate should be too cruel, and one should meet no more), is there any one so happy—or is it so miserable? — that he has not known these things as she knew them? Did she write of the narrowest coterie only? Did she write pages and pages of the "tittle-tattle" of "a fine lady" or an "old nurse"? Did she write a great deal too fast (her pen had always *le bride sur le cou*, she said), as well as much too often, and never re-read what she had written? If she had soared to the finest flights of eloquence, if she had only told what would be valuable to the historian and the biographer, if she had omitted volumes almost of her tender feeling for her child, and put in a fuller account of those great spirits among whom she lived, she would have been a much greater genius and much less beloved. Her sensibilities could not but interfere a little with her wit. A great attachment was not with her, any more than with any other woman, a stimulus to great enterprises. She rested in it and was content.

Her letters have been, indeed, well called the

"Book of Repose." It is into the quiet place of the most natural of all the affections that she leads one through a vicious society and a vicious age, and in the most charming, simple, easy manner imaginable. It is the classic *des portes fermées* which she has written; the classic of that "home" for which the Frenchman has no word and such an infinite devotion. Does her soft delicacy bore one now and then? Do those pages of graceful trifles become occasionally a little monotonous, and the easy writing almost irritating in its dainty perfection? It is to be supposed that at times most readers have felt this. And there come other times when that soft and limpid French, when the charm of the writer's personality, her gentle sprightliness, and, above all, her one long, fond, supreme affection, make the book into a friend who lives.

How many years did Madame continue writing those letters? Monsieur de Grignan was made Vice-Governor of Provence, and presently Madame had little grandchildren to think about and to love. Her son fell a victim to the charms of the same siren who bewitched his father; and Madame took his follies with the softest gaiety and nonchalance. He only "amused and interested" her in fact. She had not room in her heart for a second great passion. She was a little bit vexed with him when he cut down the timber at Buron; and, when he formed a fleeting attachment for La Champmêle, she spoke gaily of the actress as *ma belle-fille*. She must have been still

more softly amused when *mon fils*, having sown so plentiful a crop of wild oats, settled down, married an heiress, and became *dévot* and austere extremely.

In her own later years Madame herself fell more and more under the sway of the quiet fatalism of the mystic Jansenist religion, to which she had been first drawn as a girl. She formed a great friendship with Corbinelli. When she was a *dévote*, he was a mystic. One can't imagine that her devotion could ever prevent her being a charming social power — bright, tactful, and sympathetic to the last hour of her life. When did she find out for certain, or had she been always sure, that she was not exempt from the fate of almost all mothers and had cared for her daughter a thousand times more than her daughter had cared for her? She was seventy years old when she came to nurse Madame de Grignan through an illness. One is glad to think she was not eating her heart out in a piteous anxiety hundreds of miles away; depending on undependable posts, and waiting—with that cold dread which such a waiting brings — for the worst. Her tender nursing restored her daughter to health. Then she herself caught a virulent small-pox. Could she have chosen, if she might have chosen, a better death than to die in the service and by the side of the child she had so abundantly loved?

The passion for Madame de Sévigné is, at least

among the French, a passion for the woman as much as for her works. And indeed one knows no more lovable person.

To think of Madame is to think of a fascination beside which beauty leaves one cold. This was the woman who always knew the happiest thing to do, and did it delightfully. She had brilliancy which never offended other people's dulness, and learning which never made the stupid feel ignorant. She would sympathise with one divinely over a lost toy or a lost hope. She could not help laughing just where she ought to have laughed; and dissolved into the most bewitching and the most natural of tears when dull persons read her their dull tragedies. She was so human too—so exquisitely human—that when the king danced a minuet with her she immediately discovered him to be the best of monarchs and of men. Wouldn't one like to have met her, to have talked with her, to have looked up into that soft sparkling face, to have been admitted to that kind intimacy, to that impulsive, faithful friendship? There have been greater and better women, no doubt, but in the whole world not one so delightful.

Was Madame profound? By no means. She was light, says one of those biographers who loved her, in all her emotions, save one. She took her religion even—and she took a good deal of it—lightly. It affected her sensibilities rather than her soul. She

found, as one has seen, the most awful denunciations of the old preachers *délicieuses*, life sometimes rather *désobligeante*, death yet more ill-natured, and ended, "Mais parlons d'autre chose." That was her philosophy.

As for the vice of the times, through which her own fair virtue passed unstained, she accepted its existence with the same gracious tact as she accepted the existence of other foolish fashions. Madame only laughed a little at failings, even in her own son, now considered more or less serious. If she was in many respects superior to her age, she had no uncomfortable airs of superiority. When the other women of fashion flocked to see the loathsome end of the poisoners, La Voisin and De Brinvilliers, Madame went too; blithely wrote an account of the scene to her daughter, and felt, it seems, for all those tender susceptibilities, scarcely a touch of pity.

Neither are her writings the writings of the woman who takes deep views of life. "L'excès de la négligence étouffe la beauté," said she. "La grande amitié n'est jamais tranquille." "Les longues espérances usent la joie comme les longues maladies usent les douleurs." She has hardly a profounder saying. But how many people, after all, have room in their hearts for more than one great feeling at a time? Madame's was for her child.

To recall her after more than two hundred years

is to recall the perfume of garden roses, or the melody of the most delicious drawing-room music. On every page of those old letters she has left the scent of her robes and the magic of a sweet presence. As to her genius, there may be many opinions; but as to the woman, French of the French, true daughter of that delightful, bright, kind, witty, tactful and light-hearted nation, there can be but one.

MADAME VIGÉE LE BRUN

JUST a century and a half ago was born in old Paris a little girl, who was to immortalise by her talent not only herself, but almost all the crowned heads of Europe. Her father was a painter *au pastel*, and of charming little pictures in the Watteau manner. He was, too, very good company with a taste for very bad; and Madame Vigée his wife was charmingly pretty, pious, and prudent.

Mademoiselle Élisabeth Louise was an artist at six years old. She was born an artist, one should rather say. At the convent school she drew in her copy-books, on the walls—everywhere—to the horror of the nuns, no doubt, and the delight of that impulsive Bohemian, her father. She was about seven when she sketched *à la lampe* a Man with a Beard, and M. Vigée, looking at it cried, "transported with joy," "Tu seras peintre ou jamais il n'en sera!"

Élisabeth was rather a plain little girl, with a thin face and great deep eyes. "Later on, I became pretty," she says with her adorable naïveté. One cannot fancy that her own beauty, or want of it, was at any time of the first moment to her.

It was other people's for which she was always looking.

She was only about thirteen when that charming, gay, easy-going father died, with some shadow of the awful times that were coming upon his country, falling across even his light heart. The child mourned him tenderly. He had been more to her than her mother was. Her little brother was three years younger than herself. The household was a very poor one. The girl artist turned to her easel for her hope and happiness in life. Her talent was, as any true talent must be, the best refuge against all troubles, a work and an interest for ever. She had a companion who painted with her. One can fancy the little Élisabeth in the white frock she always wore, fragrantly girlish, and with that grace and sweetness which she put into all her pictures, growing daily into her own face and character.

Her talent began to be talked of, and brought her presently the acquaintance of Vernet, who told her to follow no school—only Nature, "the first of all masters." She copied some of those exquisite *têtes de jeunes filles* of Greuze. She painted one portrait, and then another, and another. It was evident she had had no master. She was always herself. She had unspoiled her own great gift of seeing loveliness fresh from the Divine Finger, through ridiculous fashions of dress, and much more disfiguring fashions

of thought and of conduct. She was soon earning so much money that it seems hardly necessary for her mother to have married a very rich and objectionable person called Le Sèvre, to retrieve the poor little Le Vigée fortunes. The great ladies of the Court and of the Faubourg St. Germain began to call on the artist. She painted one of their number, the Duchesse de Chartres. Kindly old Madame Geoffrin was among her visitors. In a word, Mademoiselle was the mode.

She was asked out soon into the very highest society. She was not only a charming artist, she was a charming girl. The old thinness that spoiled her childish face had gone. She had the bloom and the freshness of a flower, curling hair, sweet eyes, tender mouth. She had the innocence of a life spent entirely in devotion to one pure passion. She had hardly any thoughts beyond it. She had never read a novel She was very naïve and gently gay, with a kindly little sense of humour, and a blithe little girlish heart.

She gave up going out to dinners presently. It took up so much time and wasted precious daylight! Mademoiselle herself tells the story of how one day when she was just ready to dine out, in her very best blue satin frock, she ran back to her studio to look at a portrait just begun—and sat down on a chair in front of her easel on her wet palette—"which made me resolve," says

she, in her direct little manner, "de ne plus accepter que les soupers."

She was hardly twenty years old when her mother pointed out to her the advisability of her marrying a certain Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Brun, painter. M. Le Brun was very lively and good-natured, extravagant, a gambler—and worse. Shall I marry him? Marriage might distract me from my beloved painting, which would be unendurable; but on the other hand it would relieve me of the society of that *villain beau-pere*. All the way to church the bride was asking herself, "Shall I, or shall I not?" She had a great deal less knowledge of the world than an ordinary capable modern child of twelve. The importance of that "No" or that "Yes" which she was about to utter, she certainly did not realise. But Fate whispered in her pretty ear, and she said "Yes."

The marriage was kept secret for a time. The newly-made Madame went on painting as usual. Then the secret was revealed. M. Le Brun had discovered what a profitable investment a talented wife could be. Madame painted a host of portraits. She even began to teach some girls. But the pupils' ignorance wearied her, and their gaiety infected an instructress no older than they were; so that one day when she found them swinging instead of applying themselves to art, she gave them the gravest lecture on their naughtiness, and then really *must* try the swing herself.

Her painting absorbed her thoughts more than ever.

There would have been nothing made ready for her little daughter on her entrance into this cold world if it had not been for the timely help of a kindly and practical friend of the girl-mother's. On the day the child was born Madame was working at her *Venus Qui Lie les Ailes de l'Amour*.

It was only when that little daughter lay in her arms that she knew a better happiness than even art could give her: and in that tenderest of all pictures "Madame Vigée Le Brun and her daughter, painted by herself," one sees how "her work was still the better for her love."

In 1779 she first painted Marie Antoinette. She had seen the queen before at Marly-le-Roi, walking in the Park with her ladies, white-frocked, gay, and laughing. She was now in the dazzling morning of her beauty. Madame could find no colours in her box to reproduce *l'éclat de son teint:* no genius in herself to give the world any adequate idea of that stately carriage of the head at once sweet and majestic, of that expression at once proud and tender, of that exquisite skin which, says the artist, was so transparent that it took no shadows.

After this she painted and repainted her royal mistress. She was the most perfect of all models. In 1788 Madame sent to the Salon that picture of the queen, with Madame Royale by her side, the Duc de Normandie on her knee, and the first Dauphin standing by the side of the empty cradle. The frame

of the picture alone appeared in the Salon at first. "Voilà le déficit, disait on." And the name clung to the queen, with what a fatal persistence history knows. But the picture also inspired one of the very, very few happy sayings ever attributed to poor, fat, weak, irresolute, unlucky Louis. "I know nothing about painting," said he to Madame Le Brun, "but you have made me love it."

Madame sang to the queen while she sat to her. She had the sweetest little voice in the world. When she was doing the portrait of Monsieur, afterwards Louis XVIII., *he* sang to *her*—false. "How do you find that I sing, Madame Le Brun?" said he. "Like a prince, Monseigneur," she answered with a very useful wit.

In turn, she painted almost all the Royal family. She tried to make her models forego the monstrous head-dress and formal robes which were the fashion. For herself, she had always her white frock of muslin and her own curly hair, unpowdered. She put a little fichu over her head sometimes. She was an artist, body as well as soul. No customs and modes drew a film over her eyes, and made her think in time that what was usual must be beautiful. She always wished to draw the Marie Antoinette of Trianon in her country gown, with a basket in her hand, laughing lips, fair curls—not a stately queen but a lovely girl. And later on, in Russia, she wanted to reproduce the Grand Duchess Alexander as she first saw her—a Psyche watering pinks at her casement, with

her hair about her neck, and a ribbon enclosing the roundest and supplest waist in the world. But Madame had fortunately so far the touch of genius, that through all fashion's hideousness she could draw out the virgin sweetness of a Madame Élisabeth, and find in the king's aunt, Louise-Marie-Adelaide de Bourbon, the tenderest grace and charm. If it be said she put into her portraits a beauty which the originals never knew, it may be answered that the beauty is there always in every human face, in every sunset and sunrise, in a kitten at play, in the red fog on the river, but that it needs the poet or the artist to see it and reveal it to a grosser world.

Madame went to Holland with her husband: and on her return to Paris was received into the Royal Academy of Painting. In the early days of her marriage she lived in the Rue de Cléry, and received there all the celebrities of art and literature and the great people of the Court. The hostess never flattered her gentle self that they came to see *her*. She gave them the best music in Paris, and besides, said she, they liked to talk with each other. But one may well believe that the finest of fine company was not proof against the charm of this artless artist, with her girlish face and that sweet singing voice, with its "silver tones" which Gréty loved. After the parties there was the simplest of little suppers; and by twelve the guests had left. Madame went out a little herself, but balls—even the prim balls of the time, where

eight serious persons performed a *contre-danse* and "one is not stifled as one is now"—did not please her. She had acted a little too—and charmingly one may be very sure—in comedies. She was still quite a young woman when she went to stay with Madame du Barry at Louveciennes, and found the poor, tawdry, shameful favourite, not at all unkindly, a little mincing and affected in manner, and very good to the poor at her gates. She was again at Louveciennes in 1789. Public opinion permitted in this age the association of the guilty with the innocent with effects by no means harmless. But in the case of a Vigée Le Brun, as in that of a Lamballe or of a Madame Élisabeth, it may be said that if evil company scorched her garments it never seared her heart.

At the wild thunder-burst of the Revolution, Art, with her hands at her eyes lest they should see horrors which should blind them to beauty for ever, fled the country. Madame was of the emigration. It does not seem that she was unnecessarily courageous, this little painter. She was woman to the tips of her fingers. When the National Guard would have prevented her leaving Paris, "As every one is to have his freedom," said she, with her happy feminine wit, "I am going to make use of mine." She took her daughter with her. Her husband and brother accompanied them to Trône. Madame took very little money. She had left nearly all she had made to M. Le Brun, who spent it on himself. She was as un-

mercenary as a bird, and far less capable of looking after her own material interests. But she had a fortune in her fingers — the best of all fortunes, which necessitated work instead of exempting her from it.

She went to Italy where, in Rome, she saw Angelica Kaufmann; and could never bring herself to believe that a Raphael who painted those exquisite heads of Virgins could have been himself libertine and carnal.

At Florence she painted her own portrait by request, and still looks out from it to-day, famous for ever, with her palette in her hand, her canvas in front of her, and her face with its parted lips, half-gay, half thoughtful—a girl's face still.

At Vienna she stayed two and a half years. She made a kind of triumphal progress about the country, carrying her famous "Sybil" with her. She found a kind world everywhere she went. She was continually meeting the dearest of women and the noblest of men. She recorded her impressions with a most charming naïveté. *Her* "Memoirs" were not filled with dull things like dates and ages and explanation. She wrote, as the linnet sings, because she must. She had a delightful fund of anecdote, and no chronology at all; a gentle little vein of satire; a very fine sense of humour; and an intuition, much more useful than any solemn learning, which helped her to go straight to the point—to find the essential and to leave the superfluous.

On 25th July 1795, Madame arrived in Petersburg. She had not provided any suitable frock in which to be presented to her Mightiness, Catherine II. The Empress of all the Russias forgave the gentle painter her white muslin, and loved her as every one loved her, and could not help doing. Madame settled in Petersburg. She had her blue-eyed daughter growing up at her side. She had her art, which was more to her than mother or sister, brother, lover, or friend. The years passed her by with very swift wings. She was always painting and never taking count of time. Her portraits brought her in a more than sufficient income. If they brought her nothing, this was the artist who would rather have painted and starved than have lived in a king's palace, lapped in fulness, with her talent hidden in a napkin. She did not lay by for the future. She was always a little unpractical, and not at all far-seeing. When her daughter insisted on marrying the unsuitable man of her choice, Madame was grieved not a little, and turned to her art for comfort. The grief even affected her health. She had news from France of her mother's death; and started, herself, on a journey to Moscow for change and recovery. She went on to Potsdam and painted the beautiful Queen of Prussia. She had been away from France for twelve years when she returned to her house in the Rue du Gros Chenet in Paris, which M. Le Brun decorated to welcome her, entirely regardless of the expense entailed—upon her. She was

received with enormous enthusiasm at a concert. Greuze came to call upon her the day after her arrival. She was asked to breakfast with the First Consul. She saw all the wit, beauty, and fame of Paris; and all the wit, beauty, and fame came to see her and her pictures. Paris, indeed, was not the Paris she had left. This was the city shaken by the Terror, and with that most curious and ominous of all inscriptions still written on its walls, "Liberty, Fraternity—or Death." But Paris of the Monarchy, Paris of the Revolution, Paris of the Consulate, could but love this gentle painter of pictures, who was every one's friend, and in her own person essentially lovable.

In 1802 Madame paid a visit to London. *Mon Dieu!* but how these English are *triste* and kind. The visitor did not know a single word of their language. Their Sunday—their deadly, heavy, foggy London Sunday — especially weighed upon her gay French heart. She was a visitor presently at the most exclusive houses. The solemn magnificence of the great country seats at once impressed and oppressed her. One can't help suspecting that the latter feeling rather predominated. Your Englishmen's castles, they are so comfortable and so slow! When the ladies left the dining-room at dessert, they embroidered, says the guest, in a most beautiful room, without uttering a word. Madame felt, perhaps, as if it would be a relief to her feelings to get up and scream. When the men came in from their

wine and their politics, *they* buried themselves in books. More silence. The lively visitor gathered her courage in both hands, as it were, and proposed a walk in the park by moonlight! The brief, shocked silence which followed this astounding suggestion may be imagined but not described. My Lord Moira replied that the windows and doors were shut for the night, and, in short, that it would not do at all. My Lady Charlotte, the next morning, perhaps, took the visitor out driving with her. But the hard little open pony carts in which Englishwomen braved the winds and rains of their impossible climate were not at all to the taste of Madame of Paris. While she was in England she painted the Prince Regent and other celebrities. She stayed in the country three years; and left it with a warm French gratitude for all the kindness she had received there, and no doubt a little relief that she would soon be at home in her France.

She was now getting an old woman. She had indeed to the last day of her life a freshness and spontaneity which kept her heart young for ever.

She painted Madame Murat. She travelled in Switzerland. Her husband, her daughter, and her brother preceded her through "those dark gates across the wild that no man knows." She bought a country house at Louveciennes. She enjoyed the sweetest of all fruits—the fruits of her own labour. To her had been given in full measure the crowning blessing

of existence, "to be born with a bias to one pursuit."

She had a niece with her to the end, who made her know once more, she said, all the feelings of a mother. And at last death touched gently her to whom even life had been kind.

Madame Vigée le Brun steps out of those portraits she has painted of herself and lives again for ever. Is she in her straw hat, with her palette in her hand, recently acquired by the National Gallery; or vivacious, with a turban on her head, painted by request, for the city of Florence? It does not matter which. She is most charming as a mother, with her maternity in her sweet eyes and the little daughter's arms round her neck; but not most characteristic. This is not, perhaps, the received type of the perfect woman, this tender-hearted Bohemian who did not even know how to sew.

"But a more ideal artist she than all."

THE END

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